

DANCERS OF INDIA

RAGINI DEVI



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# DANCES OF INDIA

*With An Appendix on Indian Music*

BY  
RAGINI DEVI

Indira Gandhi National  
Centre for the Arts



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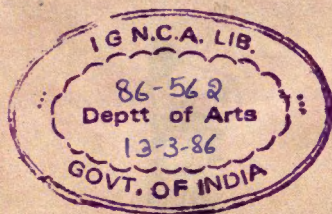
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## DANCES OF INDIA



### DANCE OF NATARAJA

Indira Gandhi National  
Centre for the Arts

**"In thy dance, Divine Dancer, freedom finds  
its image and dreams their forms.  
Its cadence weaves the threads of things and  
unwinds them for ages ;  
Charms the atom's rebellion into beauty,  
gives rhythm to the symphony of stars ;  
thrills life with pain,  
And churns up existence into surging joys  
and sorrows."**

**—Rabindranath Tagore**

## GODDESS KALI'S DANCE

"Because Thou lovest the Burning-ground,  
I have made a burning-ground of my heart—  
That Thou, Dark One, haunter of the Burning-ground  
Mayest dance Thy eternal dance.  
Nought else is within my heart, O Mother :  
Day and night blazes the funeral pyre :  
The ashes of the dead, strewn all about,  
I have preserved against Thy coming,  
With death-conquering Mahakala 'neath Thy feet  
Do Thou enter in, dancing Thy rhythmic dance  
That I may behold Thee with closed eyes."

—*A Sakta Bengali Hymn by an Anonymous Author.*



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## CHARACTERISTICS OF A DANCER

Patramsyannartanadhare vrtte prayen nartaki  
Mugdham madhyam pragalbhasca patram tredhoti kirtitam  
Mugdhaberlakshanam proktam yanvan . . . . kramat.  
Unmilitankurakucamasphutangaka sandhikam.  
Suratam pratisotsaham prathamam yauvanam matam,  
Stanau pinau tanurmadyah panipadasya raktima.  
Uru karikaravangakam tyaktasandhikam  
Nitambo vipulo nabhi gambhira jaghanam ghanam  
Vyakta romavali snaigdhyamangake saradadishu  
Jivitam manmathe syotkamam divitiyam yauvanam matam.  
Unmadakam sriyayuktam sampannaratinaipunam  
Kamasikshita bhavanca tritiyam yauvanam vidhu.

—*Nartaka-Nirnaya*

A 16th-Century Text-book on Dance composed under the patronage of Emperor Akbar.



## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This book is a revised and enlarged edition of Srimati Ragini Devi's *Nritanjali, An Introduction to Hindu Dancing*, which was published in 1928 by Hari G. Govil of the India Society, New York.

Srimati Ragini Devi has devoted her life to the Hindu dance and is recognized in India and the West as an expert in her chosen art. Her book *Nritanjali* was published in New York as a result of public interest in her recitals of Indian dance, music and song, accompanied by several Hindu musicians.

In the enlarged edition of the book Srimati Ragini Devi deals with the ideals of the Hindu classical dance, and with the living manifestations of the art. She has studied her art first-hand, from the oldest masters, and finds her chief source of inspiration in the traditional dance modes of South India, namely, the Kathakali dance-drama of Kerala, and the Nattuva Mela of the Devadasis of Tanjore.

Srimati Ragini Devi returned to India after her American tour in search of forgotten dances, visiting village temples and festivals in South India. At a temple festival in Kerala, she witnessed performances of Kathakali dance-drama for eight nights, and thus discovered an ancient form of dance-drama hidden in obscurity. She studied Kathakali under the direct supervision of Poet Vallathol at the Kerala Kalamandalam, founded by him, with Guru Kunju Kurup and other masters. Her presentation of Kathakali dances in Indian theatres, supported by Kathakali dancers and musicians, evoked national interest in this ancient art.

Under a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1950 Srimati Ragini Devi made an all-India survey of Indian dancing, enlarging her knowledge of indigenous dances.

Ragini Devi has danced and lectured at the leading Universities in India. She also gave a course of ten lectures with demonstrations for the University of London, while on a European tour. Her mission has continued to be educative, aiming toward a revival of traditional forms as a basis for the development of the dance art to the larger dimensions of modern life.

She has received tributes of appreciation from poet Rabindranath Tagore, O. C. Gangoly, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan,



K. V. Ramachandran and other connoisseurs, who gratefully acknowledge her fundamental contribution to the dance art of India.

As music is closely allied to dance, she writes a special article in the Appendix on the fundamentals of Indian music and its eternal appeal throwing light on the latest researches on *srutis* (microtones) in Indian music.

The book is illustrated with nearly fifty *Nritya Hastas* (hand poses).

The Introduction from the pen of John Martin, a famous dance critic of America, first appeared as a review of *Nritanjali* in the *New York Times*.



Indira Gandhi National  
Centre for the Arts

## INTRODUCTION

BY JOHN MARTIN

THE publication of this Introduction to Hindu Dancing, by Sri Ragini, fits itself very neatly into the scheme of things. With interest in Indian affairs stirred up to an unusual degree, it is only logical that the arts should also come in for a share of the attention. Certainly in no department of human activity have the East and the West been farther from understanding each other than in their approach to the arts. This treatise, by Ragini, a gifted dancer, singer and performer upon the Sitar and the Tambura, should do something toward clearing up in the Western mind the hazy conception of, to a large extent, the dancing of the East.

Sadly enough, to us the phrase Oriental dancing has pretty generally brought up little else than the picture of the "danse du ventre" which was for many years the particularly spicy feature of every carnival or fair from Maine to California. Though it is an unfortunate misinterpretation, it is not an unnatural one, for it grows directly out of the attempt to judge Eastern dancing by Western standards, and these, after all, are the only standards we can be expected to have to any extent.

## DANCING OF THE WEST

To us of the Western world dancing is, and probably always will be, a highly personal art. In its commoner manifestations it is an exhibition of personal skill, an exploitation of personal charm or an indulgence of personal emotion—at its best the expression of a personal concept of beauty. The finest type of Western dancer is he who, through the power of his personal vision, can penetrate farthest into the realm of the absolute and bring it into tangible relationship with the understanding of others through his personal adaptation of the principles of form. In proportion as he lacks these personal gifts he lapses into banality and ineffectualness.

The attitude of the onlookers is frequently described as a seeking for release from the routine of daily life. Generally this may be interpreted as merely the desire to be temporarily diverted; more solidly it is the desire to glimpse a fuller view of the unrealized verities that lie beyond æsthetic faith, under the leadership of one who is capable of revealing such a view.



Thus our art is always young, and must always continue to be, for it is engaged in forging ever into new regions.

### DANCER OF THE EAST

The dancer of the East has no such problems. The dance, according to the Hindu, was created by Brahma, the Creator, and given to men through the sage Bharata and his hundred sons. The *Natya Shastra*, the great work which contains the complete revelation, is spoken of as the Fifth Veda, or sacred treatise. The dancer's mission, therefore, is to be obedient to the laws laid down in this book, and under no condition to add anything of his own at risk of being guilty of trying to add to the work of the gods. The onlooker comes to share in a religious ritual rather than to be carried into any uncharted fields of æsthetic adventure. The whole process is familiar to both dancer and audience, having been performed in exactly the same manner for generations.

"All the activities of the gods," wrote Bharata in the *Natya Shastra* "whether in house or garden, spring from a natural disposition of the mind, but all the activities of men result from the conscious working of the will; therefore it is that the details of the actions to be done by men must be carefully prescribed."

"The human actor," says Dr Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in the introduction in his translation of *Abhinaya Darpana*,<sup>1</sup> from which the above is quoted, "only attains to perfect art through conscious discipline." It is this aspect of drama and dancing that has made the puppet so satisfactory a medium for the expression of the Oriental concept of the theatre, for the puppet has no will and must be obedient to the significant movements carefully devised for its execution.

The range of an art so meticulous cannot be covered in the small space of a single work of readable proportions. The *Natya Shastra* has never been translated into English in its completeness and except for "The Mirror of Gesture," which is the translation of a smaller work, *Abhinaya Darpana* of Nandikesvara, almost nothing has been written on the subject for English readers until Sri Ragini's recently issued treatise.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Miroir of Gesture.* Translated into English by A. Coomaraswamy and G. K. Duggirala, Oxford University Press, 1917, E. Weywe, New York, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Since the above was written an English Translation of the first part of Bharata's *Natya Shastra* has been lately published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Metropolitan Printing and

As its subtitle indicates, this work is only an introduction to Hindu dancing, but its brevity and sketchiness are advantageous rather than otherwise. There is nothing in this book formidably weighty to frighten the layman who is in search of enough information to enable him to be an intelligent spectator. And only a deep student of Orientalia could be expected to be more.

In addition to giving a synoptic view of the technical side of the subject, Ragini has pointed out very clearly the differences of approach in the East and in the West. "The Hindu dance," she writes, "is first of all the representation of the joy of life in all of its ideal aspects. It is concerned with the visible interpretation of the common ideal experience of mankind. Subjective individual experience, coloured by personal impulses and idiosyncrasies, does not enter consciously into the exposition of either Hindu dancing or music."

And again : "Emotional culture through drama, music and dancing is not only a means of spiritual understanding but a necessary method of character development. Character means well-regulated emotion. Dancing and music in India were considered excellent regulators of the emotions."

Needles to say, they are not so considered in America. Of the relation of music to the dance there is also an interesting difference. "The dancer and musician," says Ragini, "are always in unison. The dancer is not concerned with the necessity of interpreting a composer's intention. There are no scores or notes to be played..... The emotions and spiritual moods of the various melodies (*Ragas*) and rhythms (*Talas*) have been fixed by the canons of art which also devised their plastic representation in dance form. Dancing has therefore a power and vitality of expression which is in no sense inferior to that of music."

The difficulty of retaining anything of authenticity when a Western dancer attempts the classic Hindu Dance is evident. There are only two points at which he can hope to approach the original : one is in the matter of visual design—not a very vital consideration with the Hindu—and the other is in the matter of presenting the fact of the Hindu dancer's consecration, if not its actual spirit. Some of our dancers have

*Publishing Co. of Calcutta have also published the Sanskrit Text and an English Translation of Nandikesvarr's Abhinaya Darpana by Professor Monmohan Ghosh of Calcutta University. See Bibliography, on the end of the book, of books in Sanskrit and English on the Hindu theatre and dance.*



attempted more, with what consequences to the feeling of Hindus present may well be imagined. There seems to be no reason, however, why the exquisite externals of the dance may not be adapted and applied to our own art authentically and made to enrich our plastic vocabulary without damage to the original.

Even in India, it seems, the classic drama is no longer to be seen in its purity, the only substantial relic being the Nautch, which is such a popular subject for misrepresentation by Western dancers. That even this will probably succumb in time to the Europeanizing of the art of the East seems likely ; and it is, therefore, a happy circumstance that there should be a few devotees like Ragini who are able not only to perform the classic dances but also to write about them in such a form that we of the West may acquire some appreciation of them before they disappear from the earth.

## CHAPTER I

### THE SPIRIT OF HINDU ART

Since time immemorial the sacramental view of life has permeated all forms of Hindu art. The Hindus believe that Creative Nature is the manifested Will-Force of God. From the cycle motion of the planets to the innermost experiences of the human soul through the senses and emotions, all cosmic being has its source, activity and final culmination in the Supreme Being.

The manifestation of cosmic activity is represented in Hinduism by the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva who symbolize the powers of creation, preservation and destruction.

God the blissful, the beautiful and the beneficent; God the terrific destroyer of evil and the Lord of death, has been worshipped through the ages in India in many aspects, in many forms and by means of a symbolic ritual which included music and dancing.

Hindu art-consciousness had its origin in early Aryan worship, and gradually evolved itself into an ideal race-experience. It became a three-fold expression of life in terms of Nature, the Soul and Humanity.

The artist, according to the injunction of Hindu canons, was to withdraw himself from turmoil and distraction, to enter into the Inner Silence and draw forth from his heart the form of Beauty.

"It may sometimes be difficult for a non-Hindu fully to appreciate the images and paintings of India because their conventions and *motifs* are so peculiarly Hindu. Exactly the same difficulty arises with regard to Western art. Who but a Christian can find inspiration in a *Last Supper* or a *Holy Family* or a *God dividing light from darkness*? For that matter, even the *Aeneid* would be unintelligible to the modern Eur-American lovers of poetry unless they made it a point to study Roman history. Nay, a well-educated Jew may naturally fail to respond to the sentiments in the *Divine Comedy* or Signorelli's *Scenes from Dante*."

"But the difficulties of appreciation by foreigners do not make an art-work necessarily "local" or racial. It may still be universal in its appeal and thoroughly humanistic. There are hardly any people who in modern times can enter into the spirit of the *Ka* statues which stand by the sarcophagi in the



cave tombs of the Pharaohs. And yet how essentially akin to modern mankind were the Egyptians if we can depend on the evidence of their letters ! A *Ka* is described in one of the inscriptions thus : 'He was an exceptional man ; wise, learned, displaying true moderation of mind, distinguishing the wise man from the fool ; a father to the unfortunate, a mother to the motherless, the terror of the cruel, the protector of the disinherited, the defender of the oppressed, the husband of the widow, the refuge of the orphan.' There is no gap in fundamental humanity between the men and women of to-day and the race that could write such an epitaph, in spite of the fact that many of its conventions and usages seem entirely meaningless."

"The student of foreign literature has specially to qualify himself in order that he may understand the unfamiliar idioms of its language and the peculiar turns of expression. No other qualification is demanded in modern men and women for an appreciation of the old and distant carvings, statuettes and drawings. The chief *desideratum* is really an honest patience with the racial modes and paraphernalia of foreign art."<sup>1</sup>

Art is a universal language which races of all regions can understand. Each civilization has its own mode of expression, its architecture and its art. Each culture is different, but each makes an important contribution to a great and ever-widening world-civilization.

<sup>1</sup> Benoya Kumar Sarkar : *An Introduction to Hindu Art*.

## CHAPTER II

### DANCE CYCLES OF THE GODS

THE dance has been one of the chief forms of religious expression in India since time immemorial. The Hindu dance is conceived as an expression of spiritual energy on the earth plane through the senses and intelligence. The rhythmic, supple movement of limbs, the ripple of form, the geometric contours and bends in space are essentially related to the Universal laws of harmony and rhythm. The cyclic whirls of the dance portray the circling processes of the spheres and the union of the soul with God.

According to the traditions and scriptures of the past, the Vedic Aryans personified the forces of nature as divine beings, called gods and goddesses. The mythological heaven of Indra (God of Rain) was inhabited by Gandharvas (divine singers), Apsaras (dancing nymphs) and Kinnaras (players upon musical instruments). Chants of invocation addressed to these various god-aspects were accompanied by dancing.

Siva, Lord of Creation, was the first dancer. Encircled by the celestial host of gods and goddesses, he danced his form infinite and eternal, expressing in an ecstasy of motion the great cosmic activities of Creation, Preservation and Destruction.

Hindu religious conceptions being conjugal rather than filial, God in his various aspects or manifestations, is associated with a feminine counterpart. The consort of Siva is Parvati, also known as Uma, Gauri, Durga and Kali, who represents the powers without which there could be no creations or evolution.

Lakshmi, the Hindu Venus, and consort of Vishnu, created the beautiful *Pavai Dance*, when she appeared before the army of Asuras (demons) as a dancer, with exquisite movements, and seductive gait. Casting aside their weapons, the Asuras pursued her, and forgot their battle.

Urvasi, peer among the Apsaras at Indra's heavenly court, taught the art to the celestial nymphs, and is said to have imparted this divine knowledge of the art to human beings.

The eight Saktis or Energies of the protecting God Vishnu were the personification of beneficent activities of the Universe. They were called the Goddesses of Wealth, Earth, Learning, Love, Peace, Pleasure and Strength.

The Apsaras or heavenly nymphs, beautiful and accomplished and adorned with ornaments, are described as "broad-



hipped, slender-waisted, powerful and graceful as panthers. Their supple waists, palms, fingers beseech, explain, deprecate and caress."

Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu is represented as playing the bamboo flute under the flowering Tree of Life. He is dressed in yellow garments, adorned with various ornaments and wears a fragrant garland of white jasmine flowers. The gold crown upon his head is decorated with peacock feathers.

The *Ras* Dance of Krishna, the Divine flute player, with Radha, his consort, attended by many enamoured devotees—milkmaids of Brindaban—has an underlying spiritual significance. The music of Krishna's flute is the Celestial songs calling the individual soul to God. Radha is the love-energy of creation. Her companions are the souls of men, responding to the appeal of the Infinite and Eternal.

The Rama and Krishna epics and the Hindu ritual worship have enriched the spirituality and art-consciousness of Java, Cambodia, Bali and Siam. In Tibet and China the influence of Buddhism is shown in the symbolic postures of sacred images.

## CHAPTER III

### CONSCIOUS DISCIPLINE OF THE THEATRE

In Hinduism the emotions are spiritualized, idealized and universalized as emanating from the divine Source and Substance of all emotions, namely God. Emotional culture through drama, music and dancing are not only a means of spiritual understanding but a necessary method of character development. Character means well-regulated emotion. Dancing and music in India were considered excellent regulators of the emotions. The venerable Brahmins who defined and practised the fine arts in the past believed that ill-regulated emotion ruined life and destroyed happiness. Thus it was that the Hindu drama, which included both vocal and instrumental music and dancing, became the medium of interpretation for religion, nature and human aspiration—a source of both joy and discipline to participants and beholders.

The *Natya Shastra* was spoken of as the fifth Veda (sacred treatise) and the sage Bharata, who revealed it, was regarded as the stage manager of the Gods. He was said to have received a revelation of the art of theatre direct from Brahma, the Creator, who entered into meditation and from the depths of divine thought brought forth the arts of drama, music and dancing for the joy of the universe.

The purpose of the *Natya Shastra* was the attainment of the four *puruṣarthas* or objects of human pursuit, namely: *Dharma*—the ethical and spiritual development of the individual. *Artha*—social and civic life and the acquirement of wealth. *Kama*—conjugal life, and the pleasures of environment. *Moksha*—the attainment of final salvation.

Every Hindu performance began and ended with a benediction (Nandi).

The *Nayaka* or master of dancing was required not only to be learned in every branch of his art, but his character must be free from blemish.

Only those persons who were intelligent, thoughtful, appreciative, just, free from vanity and conversant with the arts were worthy to witness a performance.

The *Nartaki* (female dancer) never tied the bells about her ankles without first consecrating them.

After making her salutation to the Gods, the dancer came before the spectators with an offering of flowers which she tossed into the audience.



(The opening paayer and the flower-offering are still continued in Indian performances).

According to Hindu definition the emotions (*rasas*) which are represented in music, gesture and dance movements, are classified as nine in number. They are Sringara, the Erotic, also called Adi cosmic desire, or which lies at the very root of creation; Vir, the Heroic; Karuna, the Pathetic; Adbhuta, the Marvellous; Hasya, the Cosmic; Bhayanak, the Terrible; Bibhatsa, the Odious; Raudra, the Furious; Shanta, the Serene.<sup>1</sup>

These nine permanent moods called *Rasas* and their subtle variations find expression in the various gestures and postures of the dance and in the facial expressions and rhythmic action of dance-drama. They are also associated with the twenty-two tones of the Hindu octave. The dance modes have therefore to be performed to certain melodies called Ragas, and at certain times or seasons.

The joy of Spring and the autumnal mood are dedicated with drama, music and dancing. *Kama*, the Hindu Cupid, rules over the Spring festival. He is the personification of Cosmic Desire and represents the eternal love element in Nature. He bears a flowery bow and five magic arrows of the five senses with which he pierces enraptured hearts.

The annual worship of Durga, the Supreme Mother aspect of life energy and of the vegetation spirit, is performed at harvest time and celebrated with a festival of music and dancing.

The Hindu dance is first of all the representation of the *joy of life* in all of its ideal aspects. It is concerned with the visible interpretation of the common ideal experience of mankind. Subjective individual experience, coloured by personal impulses and idiosyncrasies, does not enter conspicuously into the exposition of either Hindu dancing or music.

Hindu dancing is, for this reason, impersonal and animated by a sense of inner spirituality. Whether it be a ritualistic temple dance or an interpretation of romance or joy in Spring-time, it expresses a certain sweet dignity and restraint, a refinement of emotions which it derives from the traditional conception of art that belongs to India.

<sup>1</sup> On the basis of some variant readings in the text of Bharata's *Natya Shastra* some later expounders postulated the *Santa* as a *Rasa* while others refuted it. See Dr. V. Raghavan's "The Number of *Rasas*", and Professor Gaurinath Sastri's article "Rasas—How Many Are They?" in the *Presidency College Magazine*, Vol. XVI. No. 3. See also Chap. XII, —the Manipur Dance.

## CHAPTER IV

### DANCE FORMS

All dancing was classified by the Hindu masters as of two kinds, *Margi* and *Desi*. *Margi* dancing was sacred to the Gods and was performed only before the Gods. *Desi* dancing was performed at entertainments given before princes and assemblies.

The dances of celestial beings and the worshipful dances performed in the temples or at sacred festivals were included in the *Margi* system. Many accounts of such dancing are contained in legends and sacred treatises on means of worship.

An old Indian legend relates that when the Jaina saint Rishbha Deva beheld the dance performed by Nilanjasa, a female dancer in the service of the God Indra, he lost all desire for wordly life, and retired to the Kailasa Mountain (reputed abode of Shiva) where he attained to the state of Nirvana.

The *Jnana Samhita* gives explicit injunctions for the performance of dance and music in worship.

"Inspired by the sentiment of devotion, the wise perform worship with dance and music in the first part of the night, and then apply themselves to the repetition of their respective *mantras* (incantations invoking the appearance of the Gods they worship.)"

"Dance and music have again to be performed till the rising of the sun."

In the *Kashi-Khanda* it is ordained that "the man or woman who will fast on the third day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra (March-April), and at dead of night worship Mangala-Gauri (the Bestower of Blessings) with offerings of clothes, ornaments and other articles of worship, and will pass the rest of the night with dance and music, will be rewarded with blessings beyond his or her expectations."

Sri Chaitanya, a saintly devotee of Krishna who lived in the early sixteenth century, used to go about singing beautiful hymns in praise of Krishna. "Thus singing he would be filled with ecstasy and, in its fullness, he would be moved into the most graceful dance the world has ever seen." Thousands of those who beheld him caught his divine spirit and became his devotees.

The performance of dancing under most sacred auspices has prevailed in India through countless centuries.



The artistic composition of movement and its classification into various types of action is carefully described in the *Natya Shastra* of Bharata.

“Representations by means of bodily movements of various changes which the mind undergoes under the influence of joy, sorrow or other sentiments is called *Natya*.” *Natya* actions belong to the drama.

Expressive movements of the body which are accompanied by facial expression and governed by rules of rhythm are called *Nritya* or dancing.

*Nritya* refers simply to movements of the limbs, and does not involve facial expression.

Dancing is again divided into two kinds known as *Tandava* and *Lasya*.

The *Tandava* dance is characterized by intense excitement, the heroic mood (*Vir*) and the touch of wrath. It also expresses cosmic activity, the divine conquest of evil or the attainment of bliss. It is performed by both sexes. *Tandava* dancing joined to vocal music often forms a prelude to a certain type of dramatic presentation.

The *Prekshani* type of *Tandava* is described as movement of the limbs without facial expression. *Bahurupa* *Tandava* includes the exhibition of a variety of expression of the *Tandava* mode.

Seven dance modes of Shiva are described in the dance treatises.

The first mode is the *Ananda Tandava* or the joyous Dance.

The second mode, the *Sandhya Tandava*, is the Evening Dance.

The third mode, the *Uma Tandava*, is danced with his consort *Uma*.

The fourth mode, the *Gauri Tandava*, is danced with his consort as *Gauri*.

The fifth mode is the *Kalika Tandava*, the primitive *Kalika* form which slays demons of evil and ignorance.

The sixth mode, the *Tripura Tandava*, represents the slaying of the demon *Tripura*.

The seventh mode is the *Samhara Tandava* or Dance of Death in which *Siva* is Lord of the burning ground, meaning that he is that which remains after the annihilation of forms. His dance symbolizes the release of the soul from the bondage of *Maya* (illusion).

The consort of *Shiva* as *Durga* (the demon slayer), or *Kali* (the goddess of destruction), appears as a dancer, powerful, and death-dealing, wearing garlands of bones and wielding fearful

weapons of destruction. Kali is sometimes worshipped as a war goddess.

The ecstatic dance of Krishna has none of the terrific aspects of some Shiva-Durga modes, for it is a dance of supreme joy.

*Lasya* dancing includes amorous expression and graceful movement of the limbs. It is danced by fair women and their consorts. The Ras Leela of Krishna with the Gopis of Brindaban is of the *Lasya* kind.

*Laghu* dancing is performed by raising the heels slightly and alternately beating them on the floor.

The humorous element has its legitimate place in Hindu drama and dance. The *Vidushaka* is the Hindu buffoon, and it is said to be the ancient prototype of the buffoon of medieval European drama.<sup>1</sup>

*Bhringi*, the skeleton attendant who accompanies Shiva in certain dance-modes, performs a grotesque travesty dance in imitation of his Lord's rhythmic movements.

In Java, where the great Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, is performed as a dance-drama, the hero Arjuna is always accompanied by three clowns who represent the powers of good that assist him in conquering his enemies.

The traditional *Vidushaka* is to be seen now only in Malabar where he performs in temples. His art is called Kuthu and is known only to the Chakkiyars, Brahmin descendants of the ancient Sutas or bards and actors, famed in royal courts for Sanskrit learning and Sanskrit drama (*Natya*).

The Chakkiyar as *Vidushaka* is a story teller who recites the Ramayana or Mahabharata with expository gestures and facial expressions and with various attitudes and movements. During his performance, he explains the Sanskrit story in vernacular Malayalam, making his own humorous comments, and has the utmost freedom to ridicule, or rebuke any person present without offence.

He wears a fool's cap with a tassel, and a frontal gold crown of theatrical type. His facial make-up is white and black of irregular design, with a few red spots. His skirt is worn only in front like an apron. The back view reveals his legs protruding from a short tied up *dhoti*, and there is a ridiculous bustle across the back made of frills of starched white cloth.

<sup>1</sup> Piechel, in "The Home of the Puppet-Play."



## CHAPTER V

### SYMBOLISM AND GESTURE

Hindu scriptures are replete with an intricate ideography or symbolism which represents various god aspects, nature forces, the creation of the earth and the evolution of man. Many of these symbols have a very remote ancestry, going back to the Vedic age of the early Aryans.

In India the various god aspects are associated with a *vahan* or conveyance in the form of an animal or bird. Each *vahan* is suggestive of the functions or powers of the deity.

Siva, whose abode is the Himalaya mountains rides the bull. In ancient mythology he is known as the lord of agriculture.

Lord Vishnu, whose origin is solar, is carried upon the blazing wings of the *Garuda* bird, a fabulous, fearful creature with outspread wings. Vishnu is also shown seated upon the coils of the great serpent *Adishesha* who was said to hold the earth in space.

The ten-armed *Durga* rides a lion. *Yama*, lord of death rides a buffalo. Indra, God of Rain, is seated upon the celestial elephant. *Airavata*. *Kartikaya*, god of war, mounts a peacock. The *Swastika* is the Hindu cross, a symbol of blessedness and benediction. A *serpent* stands for space as well as eternity. The *elephant* of Indra symbolizes wisdom and firmness of purpose.

An ancient story relates that Lord Niranjana took off his sacred thread of gold, snapped it asunder and cast it into the waters ; and there sprang from it the serpent Vasuki with a thousand hoods. Niranjana gave him the name of Vasuki and bade him bear the burden of these three worlds.

An *ocean* in the mythical sense means a state of consciousness.

The *lotus* flower represents the universe. Gobs are shown seated upon lotus flowers.

It is said that "the Lord created the lotus in front of him. Then he sat on it and meditated upon the first origin.

The Hindus have devised a "highly formalized and cultivated gesture language," divinely expressive of the spiritual moods and qualities of their deities.

"Some of these gestures, apart from their spiritual significance and symbolism, are wonderfully articulate with a grace

and a tenderness which is truly spiritual and non-human. These movements of the hands and 'finger plays' (*Mudras*) have been characteristically called by Sukracharya (a sage) as 'divya-kriya' or divine actions, being distinguished in their conventions from the movements and gestures of ordinary human beings."<sup>1</sup>

The arts, having originated from the gods, were said to have been taught to human beings by rishis or great sages, who were the ancient custodians of sacred knowledge, of arts and sciences.

The attainment of high spiritual powers by the individual was associated with certain postures of the body, and gestures, which not only aided concentration, but were capable of evoking the inner spiritual consciousness.

*Mudras* or hand-poses set forth in the *Natya Shastra* of Bharata included the divine actions of celestial dancers and their application to the feelings and aspirations of human beings. The representation of the *Rasas* or emotions in gesture and posture were based on certain *archetypal forms* which idealized the plastic conceptions of emotion.

The description of hand poses or *Mudras* which is given in the next chapter will serve to illustrate the importance of gesture in Hindu dancing.

The *Mudras* (hand poses) are classified under two heads:—  
(i) *Asamyutta Hastas* (single hands) and (ii) *Samyutta Hastas* (combined hands).

<sup>1</sup> O. C. Gangoly : *South Indian Bronzes, Calcutta, 1917.*

## CHAPTER VI

### HAND-SYMBOLISM IN DANCING

*Asamyutta Hastas* (Single Hands) : 1. *Pataka Hasta*. 2. *Tripataka*. 3. *Ardha-chandra*. 4. *Kartarimukha*. 5. *Arala*. 6. *Sukatunda*. 7. *Musti*. 8. *Sikhara*. 9. *Kapittha*. 10. *Kataka-mukha*. 11. *Suchimukha*. 12. *Padma Kosa*. 13. *Sarpa-sirsa*. 14. *Hamsapaksha*. 15. *Mriga-sirsa*. 16. *Chatura*. 17. *Langula*. 18. *Alapadma*. 19. *Bhramara*. 20. *Hamsasya*. 21. *Samdamsa*. 22. *Mukula*. 23. *Urna-nabha*. 24. *Tamara-chuda*. 25. *Simha-mukha*. 26. *Chandra-kala*. 27. *Trisula*. 28. *Mayura*. 29. *Bana*. 30. *Ardha-Pataka*. 31. *Shili-mukha*. 32. *Ardha-suchi*.

1. *Pataka hasta* originates from Brahma. It is the flag hand of victory; formed by extending the palm with fingers straight and close together, the thumb being also close to the hand. Upraised, with palm facing the spectators, the *Pataka* hand indicates divine assurance and grace. This gesture appears in the cosmic dance forms of Siva and is the gesture of other *devas*. It indicates the beginning or end of discourse. It is used for saying "I am," to indicate "here," waves, flower casket (two hands joined), cloud, night, benediction, etc.

*Pataka* hands are twisted upward for the world of the Gods, and downward for the lower worlds. *Pataka* hands crossed at the wrists indicate the sign *swastika*. *Pataka* hands joined palm to palm in devotional gesture are used in prayer or salutation to Gods and worthy men. This form is called *Anjali*.

If *Pataka* hands are shown with movement of arms in various directions showing grace and amorous expression, the feet moving rhythmically, the dance performed thus is called *Prasara*.

2. *Tripataka hasta* is the "three fingers" or triple flag pose. The third finger of *Pataka* hand is bent down at the middle joint. It originates from Siva, and indicates invocation, descent of the Gods or *avatar*. It is also used for holding weapons or symbols, i.e. the *Tanka* (axe), the *Mriga* (deer), the *Vajra* (thunderbolt); to apply sacred marks to the forehead, to wipe tears, to indicate going, the feet, tree, arrow shaft, etc.

3. *Ardha-Chandra* (half-moon) *hasta* is formed by stretching the thumb of the *Pataka* hand to form an angle with the hand. It indicates consecration or meditation. Making





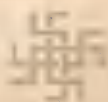
1. Pataka



2. Tripataka



3. Ardha-chandra



4. Kartari-mukha



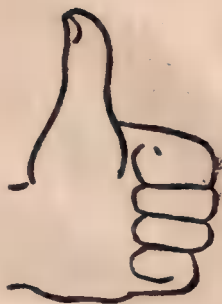
5. Arala



6. Shukatunda



7. Musti



8. Sikhara



9. Kapittha



10. Kataka-mukha



11. Suchi



12. Padma-kosa

*Ardha-chandra* with both hands, the right upward and the left downward, is called *Abhaya Mudra*, the gesture showing fearlessness, and hope. Only he who overcomes fear is spiritually free. The *Abhaya Mudra* is characteristic of the Siva dance forms.

The *Ardha-chandra* hand spread out and slightly curved with the palm upward, carries the sacred fire, a symbol of destruction.

When *Ardha-chandra* hands are crossed, palms facing the body, thumbs interlocked, they indicate the bird Garuda, the *vahan* of Vishnu.

*Ardha-chandra* hands indicate consecration, half-moon, face, forehead, broad thighs, battle axe, seizing (by the throat), rejection etc.

When *Ardha-chandra* hands are placed at the waist, palms down, and the body above the waist is moved rhythmically with grace, the dancer performs the *Lavani* dance.

4. *Kartari-Mukha hasta* (scissor's mouth) has the first and second fingers of the *Tripataka* hand separated, the first finger extended slightly backward, with the thumb touching the bent third finger. It indicates separation, lightening, and death, going, steps of walking, hours of an animal, hypocrisy, rising and falling, etc.

5. *Arala Hasta* (bent) has the first finger of the *Pataka* hand bent at the middle joint, and the thumb also bent. Other fingers are extended together and stretched. *Arala* is the hand of virtue, strength of character, and is used in going around a sacred fire or an image. It indicates blaming, taking away, wings of a bird etc.

6. *Sukatunda hasta* (parrot beak) has the third finger of the *Arala* hand bent at the middle joint. It indicates dismissal, mystic things, shooting an arrow, saying, "I don't care for you", etc.

7. *Musti hasta* (closed fist). All of the fingers are closed into the palm, and the thumb is bent over them. *Musti* is used to show strength, steadiness, exercise, to give a blow, to hold a weapon, etc.

8. *Sikhara* (peak or crest). The thumb of the *Musti* hand is extended vertically. It is used to hold the bow and other weapons and the bow of Kamadeva, God of Love. It is a symbol of *Siva-linga*, and indicates fanning, pouring water, etc.

9. *Kapittha hasta* (wood apple, a sacred fruit). The four-finger of *Sikhara* is bent over the thumb, the other fingers being closed in the palm. It is a gesture of Lakshmi holding lotuses near the shoulders. It is used for holding a veil, the end of a robe, a flower garland, a sword or other weapon. It



it also used for milking cows, offering incense, or showing a dance with blandishments.

10. *Kataka-mukha* (opening in a link). The third and fourth fingers of *Kapittha* hand are raised up, keeping the middle finger bent into the palm. It indicates a mirror, a woman, picking and collecting flowers, churning, flower-tipped arrows of Kamadeva, God of Love, playing the flute, holding a *veena* (lute), flower garland, or to indicate conversation.

11. *Suchi-mukha* (needle face) is the pointing finger, having the first finger extended, and the thumb joined to the middle finger. It indicates circle, the world, going, flame of a lamp, tusks with an elephant, threatening, pointing, sprout etc. Following the motion of Suchi hand with the eyes partly closed is called *Suchana*, a characteristic playful action of the dance.

12. *Padma-kosa* (lotus-bud). The fingers are brought close together but without touching to form the lotus bud. This hand is used to worship Siva with lotus flowers, for sacrificial offering, to indicate desire, contempt, dismissal, breast, a fruit taking food, etc.

13. *Sarpa-sirsa* (snake's head) is formed when the *Pataka* hand is curved to form a cobra hood. It is used for water offering, sprinkling water, *arati* or light waving, giving and receiving (with one or both hands), Naga or snake, etc.

14. *Hamsa-paksha* (swan-wing). The little finger of *Sarpa-sirsa* hand is raised up. It is used for embrace, accepting, 'come,' rejecting, taking, covering, small child, hearing, the number six, dancing, etc.

15. *Mriga-sirsa* is the deer's head. The little finger and thumb of *Sarpa-sirsa* are lifted up and separated from the other fingers. It is used for deer, throwing dice, calling the beloved, forehead, cow, flute of Krishna (played with two hands), etc.

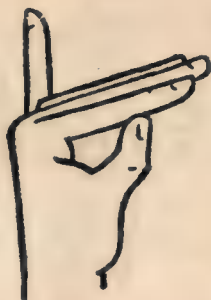
16. *Chatura* (clever). Place the thumb of *Mriga-sirsa* hand at the base of the third finger. It is used to show cleverness of eye, pleasure, cheating, advice, lotus petal, palm leaf for writing on, *lila* or grace in dancing, to indicate 'a little' etc.

17. *Langula* (a tail). Join the tips of the first and second fingers to the thumb. The third and fourth fingers are separated and raised. It indicates small things, foot of a cat, eye of a cocoanut, a jewel, a woman speaking in anger, etc.

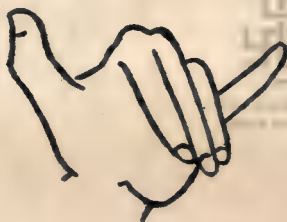
18. *Ala-padma* (full-blown lotus). All the fingers are curved and separated with a slight twisting movement, the little finger leading. The *Ala-padma* hand is also called *Utpallapadma* and *Sola-padma*. It indicates a lotus flower, the sun, beauty, desire, breasts, ball, joy, mountain and a pot. It is a fundamental *Nritta* in classical Indian dance. The lotus may



13. Sarpa-sirsa



14. Hamsa-paksha



15. Mriga-sirsa



16. Chatura



17. Langula



18. Ala-padma



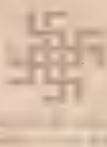
19. Bharmara



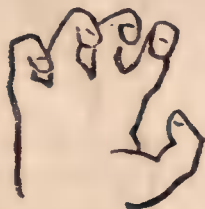
20. Hamsasya



21. Samdamsa



22. Mukula



23. Urna-nabha



24. Tamra-chuda



be shown by two *Ala-padma* hands joined at the wrists with the fingers spread to form the petals.

19. *Bhramara* (bee). The thumb and middle fingers are joined together, and the first finger is bent with their space. The other fingers are raised and separated. It indicates a bee, vow of silence, assurance, holy bath, plucking long-stemmed flowers, crane, flying creatures.

20. *Hamsasya* (swan-face). The first and second fingers are stretched forward, with the thumb joined underneath. The other fingers are separated and raised up. It indicates instruction in ritual, purity, meditation, painting a picture, affection, compassion, rubbing, holding a garland, emphasis etc. It is a fundamental *Nritta hasta* in classical dance.

21. *Samdamas* (pincers). The tip of the first finger is joined to the thumb. The other fingers are raised and separated. It indicates speaking, emphasis, tying the marriage thread, holding things, instruction, writing, wearing ornaments, ritual dance, etc.

22. *Mukula* (closed flower-bud). All the fingers are curved and brought close together with the thumb, but not touching. It indicates a water-lily, five flower-tipped arrows of the God of Love (*Panchabana*), counting five, contempt, dismissal, monkey, holding things, etc.

23. *Urna-nabha* (spider). The fingers are curved and separated. It is used to indicate a demon, claws, grasping, tearing, fear, scratching the head, etc.

24. *Tamra-chuda* (red-crest) is the cock. The first finger of the *Mukula* hand is separated and curved. It indicates a bird, hook, noose, enmity (interlocked first fingers).

25. *Simha-mukha* (lion face). The tips of the middle and third fingers are joined to the thumb, and the other fingers are extended. It denotes lion face, a hare, a pearl, fragrance, a drop of water, *moksha* or salvation, lotus garland, etc.

26. *Chandra-kala hasta* is the digit of the moon. The thumb of *Suchi* hand is stretched so that the first finger and the thumb form the crescent moon. It is used to show moon-crested Siva, 'eyebrows like the crescent moon,' tusks of an elephant or boar.

27. *Trisula* (trident). The thumb and little finger are joined, and other three fingers stretched and separated. It indicates the trident of Kartikeya, the God of War, trinity, three, etc.

28. *Mayura* (peacock). The little finger of *Kartari-mukha* hand is raised, and the thumb is joined to the third finger. It indicates peacock beak, ritual, such as holding sacred ashes, contemplation, throwing flowers on sacred *linga*, *mangalsutra*,

marriage thread, touching auspicious things, discussing *Sastras*, a gracious hand in dancing, etc.

29. *Bana* (arrow). Raise up the little finger of *Musti* hand keeping the other fingers closed in the palm. It indicates arrow, the number six, applying black ointment to the eyes, etc.

30. *Ardha-pataka* (half-flag). The little finger of *Tripataka* is bent together with the third finger. It indicates 'two things,' husband and wife, Ketaki flower, mango sprout, peak of a mountain, Gopura (tower), river bank, sword used in dancing, etc.

31. *Sili-mukha* (crab face, a female frog, . . . .). The thumb is extended, the tip of the first finger touches the middle, the other fingers are bent to look like a staircase.<sup>1</sup> (This hand is a more gracious form of *Sikhara* in the dance for grace). It is used for drinking water, pouring, to indicate a sage, steps to water tank, lips, etc. (In Kathakali it is called 'Vardha-manaka !')

32. *Ardha-suchi* (half-needle). The first finger of *suchi* hand is bent at the 'root,' and is touched at the middle joint by the thumb and the curved first finger, while the other fingers remain curved. It is used to indicate thinness of body or wasting, enmity, abuse, sprout, etc.

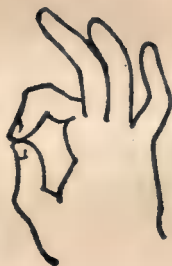
<sup>1</sup> One of forty *asamyuta hastas* described in the *Balarama-bharata* of Maharaja Bala Rama Varma (Travancore), 1756-171.



25. Simha-mukha



26. Chandra-kala



27. Trisula



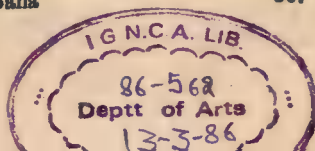
28. Mayura



29. Bana



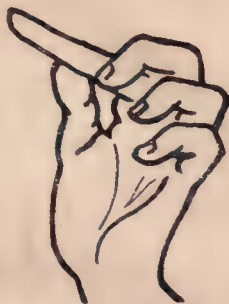
30. Ardha-pataka







31. Sili-mukha



32. Ardha-suchi



33. Kataka



34. Langula



35. Mriga-sirsa

## CHAPTER VII

### DIFFERENCES IN NAMES OF *HASTAS*

*Langula* (*Kangulu*) is also described as having the third finger of *Padma-kosa* hand bent into the palm. (See illustration No. 34). It indicates 'bee in lotus,' a fruit, partridge, etc. It is held near the face to hide shyness of a young girl.

*Kataka-mukha* (see illustration No. 10 and 33) is also described as having the forefinger and middle-finger joined to the thumb, which makes it the same as *Langula* (See illustration No. 17).

*Mriga-sirsa* (see illustration No. 35). This *hasta* is also shown with the two middle fingers extended, the thumb touching them underneath, while the first and little fingers are raised up. This is the Kathakali *Mriga-sirsa*, but is commonly used as traditional hand-symbolism in South Indian *abhinaya*.

The *Asamyutta* or single-hand gestures described and illustrated constitute the gesture alphabet of traditional *abhinaya* and dance which is in common use in the several forms of classical dance and dance-drama of South India. Names of *hastas* may vary, and there may be slight differences in the disposal of the fingers. Yet the fundamental gestures are those described in the *Natya Sastra* and *Abhinaya Darpana* and other texts.

#### *Samyutta Hastas* (Combined hands)

In gesture exposition one or both hands may be occupied in *Abhinaya*. Gestures shown with both hands are called *Samyukta hastani* or combined hands. There are twenty-four combined hands according to some authorities and twenty-seven according to others. Twenty-four combined *hastas* with hands in contact described here are those in common use in South India today.

*Anjali* (salutation)—Two *Pataka* hands with palms together is a gesture of salutation. Held above the head to salute deities before the face for preceptors and kings and at the chest for equals.

*Kapota* (dove)—Two *Pataka* hands meet at their base and sides, the palms being slightly curved. It is used in salutation, addressing venerable persons, acceptance etc.

*Karkata* (crab)—The fingers of *Urnanabha* hands are introduced into the spaces between fingers, palms facing.

It denotes grief, anxiety, blowing a conch-shell, bending the branch of a tree, multitude, belly, and stretching of limbs (stretching arms overhead, palms turned upward.)

*Garuda*—Ardha-chandra hands are held crossed with palms facing body and thumbs interlocked. It is a symbol of Garuda the eagle mount of Lord Vishnu.

*Puspaputa* (flower basket)—Sarpa-sirsa hands are joined at the sides palms up, receiving flowers, rice, fruits, offering, water-offering, etc.

*Ala-padma* (lotus)—Two Ala-padma hands joined at the wrists to form a lotus.

*Sankha* (conch)—The thumb of Ardha-chandra left hand is clasped by the fingers of Musti right hand, and the fingers of Ardha-chandra hands are pressed against the fingers of Musti right hand, the right thumb pressing the fingertips of the other hand. Denotes conch-shell, symbol of Vishnu.

*Matsya* (fish)—Two Ardha-chandra hands are held palms down, the right hand held on the back of the left. The thumbs are extended and moved. Indicates a fish, the sea, and Matsya Avatar, the fish incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

*Ala-padma* (Svatika)—Two Ala-padma hands are crossed, with palms up. It is a dance gesture, or indicates erotic dance.

*Svastika*—Two Patika hands held together at the base, palms up. It indicates crocodile mouth (directed forward), humble speech, praising, etc.

*Utsanga* (embrace)—Two Mriga-sirsa hands crossed on the breast with fingertips touching the armpits. It indicates embrace, shyness, instruction of children, etc.

*Siva Linga*—The Sikhara right hand is placed upon the upturned palm of the Patika left hand, so that the thumb of the right hand is vertical. Indicates Siva-linga, and Siva.

*Kartari-svastika*—(crossed scissors)—Crossed Kartari-Mukha hands (at the wrists) indicates trees, or peaks of mountains, when held high at the side.

*Chakra* (discus)—Ardha-chandra hands together with palms crossed (in contact). It is a symbol of Vishnu, and also indicates a wheel, a weapon (discus).

*Pasa* (noose)—The forefingers of Suchi hands are interlocked and bent. It indicates enmity, a quarrel, noose, chain.

*Kilaka* (bond)—The little fingers of two Mriga-Sirsa hands



are interlocked. It is used to indicate affection, lovers' conversation etc.

*Samputa* (casket)—The fingers of the Chakra hands are curved. It denotes a casket, box, concealing things.

*Kurma* (tortoise) - The fingers of the Chakra hand are bent, except the thumbs and the little fingers, which are extended. It denotes a tortoise, the Kurma Avatar of Vishnu.

*Varaha* (boar)—Mriga-sirsa hands are placed one on the back of the other (palms down). The thumbs and little fingers are extended.

*Naga-bandha* (Serpent-tie)—Sarpa-sirsa hands are crossed (svastika). It denotes a pair of snakes, a bower (held high).

*Khatva* (bedstead)—The Chatura hands (palms upward) finger tips touching and fore-fingers pointing downward. It indicates a bed and a litter.

*Bherunda* (bird)—Two Kapittha hands are joined at the wrists (palms facing). It indicates a pair of birds.

*Gajadanta* (elephant's tusks)—Sarpa-sirsa hands are shown with arms crossed in the middle. It denotes tusks of an elephant, lifting anything heavy.

*Lata* (creeper)—Pataka hands are held like a swing. It is used in dancing with movement, and also indicates intoxication, union.

The eloquent grace of Hindu gesture depends upon certain fundamental conceptions relative to the use of fingers, palms and wrists. The Hindu dancer considers the palm of the hand the most important centre of hand expression. Showing the palm to the spectators with various disposal of the fingers is characteristic of Hindu gesture language.

In the West, one rarely sees the palm of a dancer's hand. The profile outline of the hand with the fingers arranged in an elegant pose finds favour with Western dancers.

The wrist too has little individuality of expression, except in certain plastic dances, and so-called oriental representations where undulating on upward and downward movements of the hands allow a certain flexibility.

In Hindu dancing the wrist becomes a pivot for the movement of the hand in any direction. The motions are further supplemented by expressive use of the elbows.

No gesture is made without definite meaning and each dance has a story. If it is not sung from time to time by the dancer herself, the meaning is nevertheless very definitely in mind, and is carried out by gestures, facial expressions, and various movements of the head and body.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PLASTIC HARMONY OF MOVEMENT

The plastic interpretation of the *Rasas* or spiritual sentiments is accomplished in Hindu dancing by rhythmic sways or flexions of the body. These movements are the visible representation in actions of the refined sentiments and aspirations of human beings—and the divine moods of deities.

The ideal postures of the body in movement are based upon the *Bhargas* or bends which represent the deviations of the body from the central plumb line or equipoise of the figure. These bends are called *Abhanga* (slightly bent), *Samabhanga* (equally bent) i.e. in equilibrium, *Atibhanga* (greatly bent), and *Tribhanga* (thrice bent).

The *Abhanga* pose is shown in standing gracefully with the weight of the body placed on one leg. It indicates meditation, repose and serenity.

The *Samabhanga* pose is "the plastic equivalent to spiritual equilibrium." It is the gracious pose of seated or standing figures in equipoise.

The *Atibhanga* postures are concerned with the dramatic dance forms called *Tandava*, i.e. the elegant *Nataraja* poses of the dancing Siva—the ecstatic dance of Krishna, and others.

The *Tribhanga* posture is the thrice bent figure in which the head is inclined to one side, the torso is bent in the opposite direction, and the part of the body below the waist takes again the reverse direction. The *Tribhanga* actions are dramatic, dynamic flexions.

An appreciative interpretation of the vitality and grace of movement shown in two sculptured female dance-figures is conveyed in the following paragraph :

"The sharp, precise angles of heel, knee, hip, elbow and wrists are but the utmost suppleness and flowing curve that twists the dancer's body in a *tribhanga*, that has as much shyness, as it has aggressive life. Another dancer in similar distortion lifts up her arms fragile like glass, and her fingers do not seem to belong to her any longer but grow out of her like the capricious leaves of a young tree, which for the first time has spring."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stella Kramrisch in "The Modern Review", Nov., Calcutta, 1923.



36. Ardha Chandra.  
(Siva holding fire)



38. Bhramara (bee).



37. Ardha Chandra.





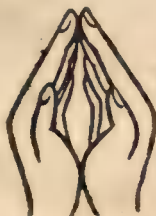
39. Gaja.



40. Hamsasya.



41. Anjali.



42. Kapota.

The distorted or bent postures of the limbs which characterize the dramatic Tandava dances somewhat resemble the 'turned out' positions of ballet dancers. The use of feet and limbs however is quite different.

The leg is often bent triangular-wise, the foot being lifted from the ground slightly or raised up as high as the opposite knee. These bends of the limbs often have corresponding bends or flexions of the head.

Expressive movements of the head are an essential part of Hindu dancing. There are said to be nine fundamental movements and a great many subtle and discriminating variations.

The *Sama* or level pose of inertia which precedes action, establishes the serene and gracious mood that clears the mind of distractions. It is the auspicious pose which precedes all performances.

In the Tandava dance modes, particularly those in the *Rasa* of *Adbhut* (the sense of wonder or astonishment), the head is nodded in a commanding manner, shaken from side to side, or deliberately moved forward and to each side with a flexible stretching of the neck. These movements are to be shown with wide open and shining eyes and uplifted brows.

In the fierce moods like *Bhayanaka* (inspiring fear or awe) and *Raudra* (cruel or terrifying), the head is nodded slowly with wide open eyes, pupils fluttering or fixed (as occasion demands) and eyebrows contracted. The head may be rocked smoothly from side to side, with an upward snake-like motion of the sides of the neck—a serpentine flexion which gives a weird, supernatural effect.

Sometimes the head is rolled with a circular motion to indicate the excitement of combative actions and the wielding of destructive weapons.

The heroic mood *Vir* expresses majesty, radiant elegance and ecstasy. The head is held high with direct and level gaze, turned rhythmically from side to side, eyes following—or directed upward and downward with a sidewise motion in which the glance is keen and active, and the torso flexion has prominence.

Erotic moods are indicated by fascinating and graceful movements of the head. The drooping head of modesty or sorrow—the alternate side-to-side motion with brilliant and rapturous glances—the tossed aside and upward movement, showing pride, aversion or playful denial—are all supple and delicate in their charm.

The peculiar fascination and snake-like suppleness of other swinging motions of the head are achieved by rhythmic movements of the neck of which there are said to be four kinds.

There is the fan-wise swing of the head from side to side, indicating love or yearning, or reflection, according to the facial expression and disposal of the limbs.

There is the horizontal side to side motion of approval, showing blandishments and grace of movement.

There is the half-moon swing of enchantment and the forward and backward pigeon-like motion indicating "You and I."

The *Alolita* or rolling head moved gracefully in a circle, shows an ecstatic mood of love and laughter ; or, according to certain variations, an intense vigour of body movement and gesture ; it is expressive of excitement, anger and obsession.

All these movements are executed with plastic smoothness and rhythm comparable to the unconscious, natural grace of wild creatures.

Beating the ground with heel or toe is characteristic of all forms of Hindu dancing. Rhythmic accent with the feet is very important, for no step is left to chance or impulse, and the bells upon the dancer's feet must always be in unison with the drum beat.

*Lasya* dancing is accompanied by the soft beating of heels or toes. The heroic *Tandava* is more conspicuously accentuated, and makes use of thumping beats of heel and toe, with a freer swing of the limbs.

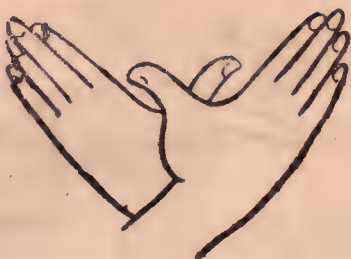
In Hindu music no liberties are taken with the rhythm. There are no *ritards* or *sustained climaxes* which break the rhythmic flow of music that is governed by measure. The swing of the rhythm is like the pendulum of a clock. Within its compass the time may be doubled or twice as fast ; it may be twice as slow, or a four-beat time may change to a six-beat without altering the main accents of the rhythm.

The understanding between dancer and musician is therefore perfect. Both are always in unison. The dancer is not concerned with the necessity of interpreting a composer's intention. There are no scores or notes to be played. The modes of melody and rhythm are so thoroughly mastered that the instrumentalists are in a sense *creators* of an infinite variety of melodic and rhythmic patterns within the prescribed forms.

The emotions and spiritual moods of the various melodies (*Ragas*) and rhythms (*Talas*) have been fixed by the canons of art which also devised their visible plastic representation in dance form. Dancing has therefore a power and vitality of expression which is in no sense inferior to that of music. But the union of the two is inevitable, since Hinduism defines *sound* as the primary symbol of *creative energy* or of the *activity* of Nature, the *drum* being its emblem.



43. Karkata.



44. Gaduda.



45. Puspaputa.



46. Matsya.

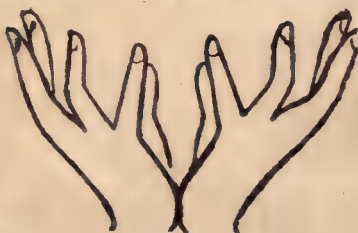


47. Sankha.





48. Alapadma Swastika.  
(Lotus Hands Crossed)



49. Alapadma.

## CHAPTER IX

### BHAGAVATA MELA DANCE-DRAMA

(Karnatic Mela Natya Tradition)

*Natya*, according to the *Sahityadarpana*, is a "poem made visible." Indian *Natya* has a poetic form and is acted in a rhythmic manner. Just as poetry differs from natural speech, so *Natya* differs from natural actions. *Lokadharmā* refers to that which is realistic and popular; *Natyadharmā* means that which is conventional, and governed by codes and formalities.

Indian *Natya* had its origin in expository dance. The first actor—*Nata*—was an actor-dancer who portrayed dramatic incidents by means of gesture and dance, with song and musical accompaniment. The *Natya Sastra* states that drama must contain *Nritya* (expository dance), *Gita* (song), and *Vadya* (instrumental accompaniment). Indian drama gives importance to gesture in place of the spoken word. It is meant to be seen by the spectator rather than heard.

Very little of this glorious dramatic art is now to be seen. The Sanskrit drama is a hereditary art of the Chakkiyars of Kerala temples,—a source of Kathakali dance-drama in Malayalam. The vernacular drama also survives in Andhra in the Kuchipudi dance-drama of Brahmin Bhagavatas; the Bhagavata Mela *Natya* in the Tanjore district of Tamilnad, and the *Yakshagana* in South Kanara on the West coast.

In a small village called *Kuchipudi* on the Krishna River in Andhra, the Kuchipudi Bhagavatas, Brahmin actors, have handed down their classical dances and dance-dramas for generations, and are well versed in the classical gesture language and dramatic dance modes of Kuchipudi *Natya*, in Telegu.<sup>1</sup> Their dramas are staged at night in the open air, some of the favourite plays being *Usha Kalyanam*, *Prahalad*, and *Bhama-kalapam*. Preliminary invocation prayers describe the ten incarnations of Vishnu in verses, which are beautifully acted in *abhinaya* and danced with vivid postures and gestures. A stage curtain is held up in front of the actors and lighting is provided by torches.

<sup>1</sup> It is recorded in the *Machupalli Kaifiyat* that in 1502 A. D. Kuchipudi Brahmin Bhagavatas were patronised by Vira Narasimha Raya, King of Vijayanagar who commended their art as being well known in the kingdom.

All roles are acted by men, who take both male and female parts. Each actor introduces himself with a *daru*, a special elaborate entrance dance, containing postures, steps and gestures, and various dance patterns. There are feminine and masculine types of *daru* accompanied by song and rhythmic syllables.

The *Gita Gorinda* of Jayadeva is one of the masterpieces of *Kuchipudi abhinaya* in classical style. *Kuchipudi Bhagavatars* claim to follow the *Abhinaya Darpana* or "The Mirror of Gesture" as their authority. *Kuchipudi* dance is related to *Devadasi Nritya* in fundamental technique and gestures, and is one of several parallel traditions of the art in South India. *Vachika abhinaya* (speech) has a place in South Indian *Natya*—though the balance between speech, gesture, songs, and dance is well established in *Kuchipudi Natya*.

In the Tanjore district *Natya* is performed at the *Vasanta Utsavam* of Lord Vishnu in Melatur and Soolamangalam. About 160 years ago, a sage, Venkatramaswamikal of Melatur in Tanjore composed a number of religious dramas: *Usha Kalyanam*, *Prahlad*, *Bhama-kalapam*, *Rukmini Kalyanam*, *Markandeya* and others, in Telugu, the art language of South India. They were dramatic poems set to music, for dancing and acting in the traditional manner. *Bhagavata Mela Natya*, as the art is called, is performed by Brahmin actors who are experts in singing, dancing and gestures.

The *daru* or entrance dance of each principal actor is elaborate in rhythmic style and rendered with grace and elegance. Dances similar to *alarippu*, *varnam*, and *padam*, with *adarujatis* (dance patterns) and *tiramanas* (final sequences) are fundamentally related to *Bharata Natyam* of the *Devadasis*. But there are both masculine and feminine dance patterns which are significant for further development of *Bharata Natyam* into a dramatic form. Fundamental similarities are noticeable in the Melatur and *Kuchipudi* dance-drama which suggest a common origin.<sup>2</sup> What the *Devadasis* have learned from the non-Brahmin *Nattuvans* is only a part of a great dance art current among several groups of hereditary experts.

<sup>2</sup> *Achyutappa Nayak*, King of Tanjore (1561-1614 A. D.) bestowed lands on Telugu Brahmin Bhagavatars who came to settle in Tanjore with their families after the fall of the Vijayanagar Empire. They built a Village called *Achyutapuram* after their benefactor. It was later called 'Melatur'.

The Vasanta Utsavam festival was not celebrated with *Natya* for nine years due to financial difficulties in staging the plays. There are very few of the actors left to maintain the art, though the dramas have lately been performed.

Within ten years both Kuchipudi and Bhagavata Mela *Natya* will be lost arts in India, since the practise of *Natya Kala* will end with the present old masters. Their sons will not learn an art for which there is little appreciation and no economic security.

On the West coast in South Kanara there are seasonal performances of Yakshagana dance-dramas which begin with the festival of Divali at local temples. The plays are in Kanarese and importance is given to speech. A vocal chorus sings the dramatic poem in verses which are followed by extemporized dialogues, a feature of old folk plays and dramas. The actors are very clever in improvised speech, and the various intonations and inflections are derived from the *Natya Sastra* traditions.

Yakshagana actors claim that their dance is in the mode of Indra. Each scene ends with a brisk dance, and combat scenes are particularly impressive for the vigorous dances with squatting and whirling movements of great skill.

The chief attraction of Yakshagana is the costumes and make-up. Head-dresses are of many kinds, and shine magnificently in the torchlight. Chest ornaments, belts and shoulder pieces are elaborately decorated with bits of glass, and costumes are colourful and traditional.

Yakshagana actors are experts in facial make-ups some of which bear a resemblance to Kathakali *asura* or demon characters. Heroic characters, like Indra, Bhima and Arjuna, have a smooth light-coloured facial make-up of a mask-like type, and distinguished by a conventional black moustache of flat design, while the very young characters have no moustaches. The theatrical splendour of make-up, costumes, head-dresses and ornaments, and the general heroic demeanour of the actors distinguish Yakshagana dramas from other forms that have neglected costuming and make-up and have a tendency to imitate the modern stage in this respect.

A stage curtain is held in front of the actors, and torches provide lighting. The actor first touches his hands to the earth, then dances with his back to the curtain, and exhibits his profile, before finally facing the audience.

Preliminary dances of Bala Gopala, Indra, and Ardhanari are generally omitted to shorten performances. The dance



of the Yakshini, a female character, and group dance of women, all impersonated by men in women's attire, are also omitted. Women characters wear the modern sari, and their dances are very feeble, because of neglect.

The general style of the dances is heroic, with leaps and rapid progressions to open or close a theme or discourse. The dances do not resemble Bharata Natyam nor Kathakali with their deep knee bends and patterned footwork, and definite formal dance postures. One has the impression that the Yakshagana theatre is a very old art which was originally North Indian, but assimilated some features of Dravidian Natya.



## CHAPTER X

### DANCES OF THE DEVADASIS

(*Bharata-Natyam Style*)

The first dance-drama was presented in the celestial Court of Indra, King of the Devas. Brahma, the Great Guru, who brought forth the Natya Veda, commanded the sage Bharata to produce a dance-drama in honour of Indra's victory over the Danavas, enemies of the Gods.

Bharatamuni rehearsed his one hundred sons, but when it came to the graceful Kaisiki dancing he realized that only women could properly dance the graceful style. He informed Brahma of his difficulty and Brahma then created the *Apsaras*, celestial nymphs, to take part in the Natya.

When the play was about to begin in celebration of the Banner Festival of Indra, the Danavas, who were displeased at the subject of the play, employed supernatural powers which caused the actors to remain immovable and speechless. Indra, in great anger, siezed his jewelled banner staff (Indra Dhvaja) and beat the Danavas. Thus the Indra Dhvaja was henceforth called *Jarjara* and Indra said, "Let it be so : this *Jarjara* will be the protection of all actors." Worship was then offered to the Gods to ward off evil forces—and ensure the success of the play. The *Jarjara*, appropriately decorated and garlanded, was consecrated with a *mantra*. These preliminary rites were called *Purvaranga* and the ritual procedure was recorded in great detail in the Natya Sastra of Bharata.

The *Jarjara* came to earth when Jayanta, the son of Indra, was reborn as a bamboo tree because of a curse. Once when the Apsara Urvasi was performing an enchanting dance before Indra Deva, her glance met the impassioned gaze of Jayanta, and for a moment her mind was diverted from the dance. The sage Agastya, observing this, became angry and pronounced a curse upon Urvasi and Jayanta. Urvasi was to be born on earth as a Devadasi (a votary of the Gods), and Jayanta was to be born as a bamboo tree in the Vindhya Hillis. Urvasi and Jayanta fell at the feet of the great sage and begged him to retract his curse. Agastya then decreed that when Urvasi would have her debut or *Arangetral* as a dancer before God, she would be presented with the *Thalaiakole* (Jayanta in the form of a bamboo staff). Then the curse would be lifted and Urvasi and Jayanta would ascend to Heaven. Urvasi was re-born on earth

as a Devadasi in Kancheepuram. On the day of her *Arangetral*, the *Thalaikole* was presented to her. At that moment Urvasi and Jayanta were freed from the curse and ascended to the celestial abode of Indra Deva.

Urvasi is said to have taught dancing to the Devadasis, temple dancers of South India. Their devotional dances were an essential part of temple service for centuries, and the Devadasis were highly revered and admired in the community. Dedicated to temples in early childhood, young girls were taught the arts of classical dance and music by dance masters, called *Nattuvans*, attached to the temple. The dedication ceremony of a Devadasi was performed by the temple priest who tied the marriage Bottu (Tali) around the neck of the Dasi and married her to the diety of the shrine. Devadasis were called *Nitya Sumangalis*, 'eternally married!'

The beginning of dance training was a solemn and ceremonious occasion with worship, flower offering, music and obeisance to the *Nattuvans*. Anklets of bells were tied, and the young Devadasi danced the first rhythmic beats of her feet while holding a symbolic bamboo staff wrapped in silk. On completion of seven years of training in dance and song, the first dance performance (*Arangetral*) took place in the temple, in the presence of the king, and the accomplished dancer was given the title of '*Thalaikole*.'<sup>1</sup> She had various ritual duties to perform in the daily temple service, in addition to devotional songs and dances.

Under the lavish patronage of the great Chola King, Raja Raja Deva I (984 to 1020 A. D.), four hundred dancing girls were settled at Tanjore as Devadasis to perform ritual dances and ceremonies in Bhrahadiswara Temple. There were also Rajadasis, who danced at royal functions, and Alankara-dasis who danced at marriages, and other social ceremonies.

The classical dance was first taught by Bhagavata Melas or Brahmin guilds, and later came into the hands of Nattuva Melas, or non-Brahmin guilds. Even to-day the Nattuvans guard the secrets of their art which is derived from the *Natya Sastra*, and is now popularly re-named '*Bharata Natyam*'. Other names for the art are Dasi Attam, Sadir Natya and Nattuva Mela.

<sup>1</sup> Reference to the '*Thalaikole*' is found in *Silappidiskaram*, a Tamil classic of the second century A. D. The *Arangetral* of Madhavi, a dancing girl takes place at the Indra Festival, in the presence of the king. The '*Thalaikole*' encased in gold, and set with precious gems is placed upon the stage (*Arangam*).

The fundamental cadences of dance are classified in the *Natya Sastra* as *Karana* and *Angahara*. A *Karana* is the rhythmic movement of the body in which gesture, step and attitude are co-ordinated in a harmonious movement. A sequence of these movements in the changing patterns of the dance, is called an *Angahara*, or combination of *Karanas*. *Anga* refers to the body and *Hara* is a name of Siva, 'Lord of the Dance' who created the thirty-two *Angaharas* described in detail in the *Natya Sastra*. One hundred and eight *Karanas* are sculptured in the great Chidambaram Temple of Nataraja. Theoretically they are a forgotten art, though fragmentary sequences of *Karanas* are to be seen in the South Indian dance and dance-drama, including Kathakali.

The *Adavu* is the basic unit of dance in Tamil tradition. A cadence of the hands, a rhythmic movement of the feet, combined with movements of the body in precise co-ordination, is called an *Adavu*. There are ten different classes of *Adavus*, and in each class twelve varieties. They form the alphabet of dance composition, which the student must perfect first of all. The practise of *Adavus* is accompanied by the recitation of syllables and each *Adavu* combination is danced to three timings, *viz.* slow, medium, and fast, (*Vilamba Kala*, *Madhya Kala*, *Druta Kala*) under the direction of the Nattuvanar.

The basis of rhythm in the dance is the *jati*—a combination of several syllables of long and short duration. There are five kinds of *jatis* or time-units of 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9 beats. They are called *Tisra* (3), *Chaturasra* (4), *Khands* (5), *Misra* (7), and *Sankirna*. (9). *Jatis* are the foundation of South Indian *talas*, drum rhythms and dance rhythms. Examples of *jati* syllables for dance are, (in simple form):

<i>Tisra jati</i> :	ta-ki-ta
<i>Chaturasra</i> :	ta-ka dhi-mi
<i>Khanda jati</i> :	ta-ka ta-ki-ta
<i>Misra jati</i> :	ta-ka dhi-ni ta-ki-ta
<i>Sankirna jati</i> :	ta-ka dhi-mi ta-ka ta-ki-ta

The combination of *adavus* with *jati* syllables is called *adavu-jati*. A sequence of *adavus* strung together in the *tala avarita* (section of time measure) and culminating in a dance finale, is a *tiramana*.

*Nritta hastas* articulate rhythms in formalized gesture patterns of the hands. The outspread *Pataka hastas*, the vertical or inverted *Sikhara hastas*, alternating *Allapadma* and *Hamsasya hastas*, and lateral and diagonal *Tripataka hastas* describe beautiful patterns and contours in space.

Perfection of style is the aim of the dancer. She does not create her dances. The masters have done that to perfection.



As the musician plays the score of a great composer without alteration, so the dancer performs the dance composed by the gifted choreographer.

One of the greatest and oldest teachers of Bharata Natyam was the late Vidwan Sri Minakshi Sundaram Pillai of Pandanallur. His fundamental style is characterized by precise co-ordination, vitality, and a courtly grace.

Bharata Natyam was brought to its present form about one hundred years ago by four eminent dance masters and musicians of Tanjore, four brothers,—Chinnaya, Ponnayya, Sivanandam and Vadivelu. The dances were reformed to be performed in a shorter period of time so that various traditional styles of composition could be given in an evening's programme.

*Alarippu*. The conventional order in which programmes are planned places the invocation dance first. The *Alarippu*, which literally means 'flowering' presents the dancer in the role of a devotee. The dance begins with the *anjali* pose of the hands above the head in adoration, followed by gesture patterns of petal-like symmetry and enchanting flexions of neck and shoulder (*rechakas*), to the accompaniment of rhythmic syllables in double and triple time.

*Jatiswaram*. It is a dignified and majestic dance—a *swara-sahitya*—composed of melodic patterns of *swaras* which are given visible form in the patterns of the dance. In thus transcribing melodic phrases, gestures and postures have dramatic force in the dance.

*Shabdham* is a form of gesture song in which *abhinaya* is shown in gestures, facial expression and certain dramatic postures. It begins with a *tiramana* (dance pattern) which also forms an occasional interlude. The theme of the song is both devotional and erotic, relating to the divine amours of the gods.


*Varnam* is the most elaborate composition of the dance which calls forth the versatility of the dancer in both dance and *abhinaya*. It is accompanied by music of a high order. Beginning with a *tiramana* in the three *kalas* (tempo) *varnam* is evenly balanced between *abhinaya* and pure dance. The most fascinating element of the *nritya* is the exposition of *sanchari bhava*, depicting the changing moods of love and the various aspects of a love situation. The dancer thus creates a gesture poem of her own to enhance the literal meaning of the poem. The dance reaches its climax in the *Charanam*, or final part, in exquisite dance patterns of great variety and beauty.

A *Padam* is a love song generally concerned with the romances and love situations of the gods. The gesture exposition calls forth the dramatic skill of the dancer in *hasta*

*abhinaya* (expository gesture) and *mukha-abhinaya* (facial expression.) The dance portions are generally confined to dramatic postures and the conventional manner of walking and moving on the stage.

*Tillana* is a joyous fantasy of pure dance, the most graceful of all styles of Bharata Natyam. The exquisite cadences and flexions of neck, shoulder and waist, the contrast between sculpturesque posture and rapid movement, interspersed with rhythm in double and tripple timings, provide a brilliant summary of dance, in a freer style—danced to recurring *jati* syllables.

Devadasi Nritya is one of the loveliest forms of Indian dance. Its artistic principles and technique are most significant for us today, as they link the past with the present, re-emphasizing aesthetic ideals and traditional forms at a time when there is a tendency to exploit and distort classical *Natya* and *Sangit*, on the modern stage and in films, by those who claim to be 'modern' and 'creative' in the arts.



## CHAPTER XI

### KATHAKALI—THE DANCE-DRAMA OF KERALA

The ancient kingdom of Kerala extended from the southern tip of India at Cape Comorin along the west coast to the vicinity of Mangalore in the north. Kerala is mentioned in the Ramayana and in the edicts of Asoka (272 to 232 B. C.). Under the rule of the Chera kings and the later Perumals, the arts of the times were highly developed.

An ancient reference to the dance-drama of Kerala is contained in the Silappadikaram (story of the anklet), a Tamil classic of the second century A. D. It contains a description of dramatic mime and dance by a 'Sakkayan' (Chakkiyar) from Perur, Travancore, performed before a Chera king, Senguttuvan, where a halt was made in the Nilgiris during a journey of military conquest.

The Chakkiyars are hereditary Brahmin actors attached to the temples of Malabar where, even to-day, they perform classical Sanskrit dramas in a traditional manner. Performances take place within the temple and the women called Nangyars also participate. Drama is called *Kudiyattam* and solo acting *Kuthu*. Chakkiyar actors are famous experts in *abhinaya* and dance. Movements of eyeballs, brows, cheeks, lips, and chin convey the expressions of the face, and gestures of the hands accompany the words of the play spoken by the actors in a certain manner.

The art of *Natya* in Kerala is said to have reached its zenith during the reign of Kulasekhara Perumal,—a poet, dramatist and expert actor of the time (412 to 430 A. D.). Kerala dance-drama continued to thrive under royal patronage and achieved a further development of note in the latter part of the 15th century with the performance of a dance-drama, "*Ramanattam*."<sup>1</sup> This was a dance-drama in which speech was entirely.

<sup>1</sup> We have it on definite authority that Princely royalty welcomed Kathakali about 600 years ago when Kottarakara Raja composed eight plays based on the epic Ramayana and gave the collective title "*Ramanattam*".

Ref.—Dr. C. Achchuta Menon : "*Kathakali Dance*". *The Indian Listener*, Oct. 22, 1950

discarded, and acting consisted of gestures, facial expressions, postures and dance. The story-poem was sung by background singers. Colourful costumes, jewelled head-dresses and ornaments added splendour to the play. The Raja himself was a gifted actor. Following the success of Ramazattam, other plays were written in Malayalam and presented as Kathakali dance-dramas!

Kathakali 'story-play' fulfilled the need for a less restricted form of dance-drama which could be staged outside temples in the open air. The Kudiattam of the Chakkiyars provided the gesture vocabulary, dance, and dramatic formalities, while the religious festivals of the Sakti cult exerted a strong influence on Kathakali. Actor-priests, who impersonated the Goddess Bhagavati and her hosts in conflict with the Asuras, were adept in exorcism, trance, and sorcery. The vitality of their dance modes as well as make-ups and costumes have made a notable contribution to Kathakali theatre.

The participation of royal princes of Kerala in Kathakali both as gifted writers and actors created rivalry among the princes in the presentation of plays. The Zamorin Raja of Calicut (Koyilkotta) presented Krishnanattam, a dance-drama in eight parts, on the life of Lord Krishna. It was written in Sanskrit verse by Manadeva, nephew of the Zamorin, who was a great devotee of Vilvamangalam Swamiyar III. Krishnanattam was regarded as a holy performance that conferred divine grace upon its beholders. A troupe is maintained by the present Zamorin to hold the play each year at the Palace and at Guruvayur Temple, a famous shrine of Lord Krishna. For three hundreds years this sacred drama has been presented without any change in dramatic form or costumes, and it has preserved certain beautiful dance movements that are now forgotten in Kathakali.

Krishnanattam resembles Kathakali in its make-up, costumes and head-dresses. The *abhinaya* is also the same, though dance is given more importance than *abhinaya* in the plays. The instrumental accompaniment is also the same as Kathakali, with the omission of the drum called Chenda.

Masks are used to represent Brahma, and certain demon and monkey characters—and in this it differs from Kathakali, where masks are never used. In certain rituals the use of masks is an old practice in Malabar.

Krishnanattam performances are restricted to palace plays and the annual temple performances. The troupe plays only once a year at these places and is never allowed to travel outside the Zamorin's jurisdiction.

There are more than one hundred Kathakali plays, of



which quite a number were written by ruling princes of Kerala in the last six hundred years. Kathakali troupes were maintained by them to perform plays, and it became fashionable for the landed aristocracy to follow royal example in patronizing the art.

Kathakali troupes are usually maintained by wealthy Nambudri landlords for performances at temple festivals. Plays are also available at any time. Epic dramas from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as Pauranic episodes, are the subjects of Kathakali dramas which are staged in the open air under a cloth canopy or thatch of palm leaves supported by four poles.

The play is announced in the evening by the Kelikottu, a special kind of elaborate drumming with gong and cymbals which can be heard for miles to summon the audience. A bell metal temple lamp is set and lighted. When the play is about to begin, a decorated stage curtain is held up by two attendants to conceal the actors. Young boys dance the Todayam invocation behind the curtain to the chanted accompaniment of rhythmic syllables and *slokas* in praise of the gods. Though the dance is not seen by the spectators, it is a fine composition of varied foot rhythms and dance sequences fundamental to Kathakali. There is an interlude of song after which the curtain is lowered for the first dance, the devotional Purappadu, a classical dance usually performed by male and female characters in unison.

The first scene of the play is preceded by vocal music and drumming and the curtain is gradually lowered to reveal the faces of the actors and thereafter the entire scene. Acting is accompanied by vocal music, the singer-narrator standing behind the actors. The drums used are of two kinds—the Maddalam, a long drum played with the hands at both ends, and Chenda, a cylindrical drum standing upright and beaten with sticks on one end. The Maddalam is resonant, blending with the voice in a remarkable way; the Chenda strident and exciting, particularly suited to scenes of strife and violence. A bell metal gong and a pair of large cymbals complete the percussion ensemble that supports the vocal narrative and provides the accompaniment for the dance sequences called Kalasam. Sarangadeva's *Sangit Ratnakara* defines the Kalasam as an instrumental finale with drums, but in Kathakali the dance finale coincides with drum finale.

The faces of the actors are painted in mask-like designs with accentuated eyebrows and eyes, and a white facial outline or ridge called *Chutti*. Each mask design and toe combination colours used suggests a character type. Divine beings, kings and heroes, are classified as Satvika; those having vices such

as greed, pride and lust are called *Rajasa*; terrifying and destructive *Asuras*, demons and she-demons are *Tamasa* characters. The basic make-up of the *Satvika* character is a light pea-green paint which covers the face, extending along the cheek-bones to the chin. This takes in the area of facial expression, and is bordered by the white *Chutti*. The green facial paint is traditional also for *Kudiyattam* and *Ottamtullal* (solo mime). Eye-brows are stylized in black and the eyes elongated with a black outline to enhance movement and expression of brows and eyes. Characters having vices are given a red and white twist above the upper lip, extending to the cheeks like a conventional moustache, on a basic green make-up and other red and white lines on brows and nose. Demon characters of the ferocious type have a red, black and white make up. They include she-demons and barbaric forest hunters. The imagination can hardly conceive of a more fearful and terrifying figure than that of the *Kathakali* demon with towering head dress, fierce fangs, challenging cry, and powerful gestures.

Male dancers wear a pagoda-like jewelled head-dress, having a large circular ornamented disk at the back,—or a dome-like crown decorated with silver fringe and topped by a cluster of trimmed peacock feathers. Principal characters wear a long sleeved upper garment over which gilded shoulder ornaments, wide armlets, and elaborate chest pieces are tied. The skirt-like lower garment of white strips of cloth, pleated and bordered, stands out from the body so that the legs have freedom of movement. A wide gilded girdle and small and large ear ornaments complete the costume. Long silver nails are worn on the fingers and thumb of the left hand, and bells are fixed on the legs below the knees.

Brahmins, charioteers, messengers, etc. paint their faces in buff colour and do not have the white *Chutti*. The upper bodies of such male characters are usually bare, except for a scarf or cloth. The female characters, acted by boys, wear a long sleeved upper garment, a long head cloth, like a veil, entirely covering the head and bordered by forehead ornaments, and a white cloth pleated and draped into a skirt. Necklaces, armlets, and a girdle of gilded medallions set with jewels and strung together, add beauty to the costumes.

The *Kathakali* gesture language is a grammatically complete language of hand symbols, and in this it stands apart from other forms of dramatic mime. Gestures not only serve the practical purpose of communication, but they have a poetry of their own in depicting any theme, situation, emotion or

action required. Each theme has its own sequence of hand positions and movements with co-ordinated attitude and body movements. The opening lotus bud is shown, not only by a single gesture symbol, but also by a series of hand movements, beginning with a cyclic twist of the hand to suggest the very growth of the flower, followed by delicate movements of the fingers to indicate unfolding petals.

The basic attitude of limbs and feet in Kathakali has technical conventions as exacting as the ballet. The knees are bent and the feet set wide apart with the toes pointing forward the outer side of the sole resting on the ground. The manner of stepping, beating the heels and raising the feet distinguishes it from other forms of Indian dance. Special gymnastics and a system of oil bath and massage with the feet, while the pupil lies in a certain position, keep the body flexible.

A remarkable accomplishment of Kathakali drama is the *abhinaya* of the eyes. The eyeballs are rolled upward, downward, from side to side, in circles and diagonal movements, according to the required sentiment.

There are eight fundamental movements of the eye, and they are often called *Nritta Dristi*, 'dance of the eyes.' The movements are circular, diagonal, vertical, horizontal (side to side), fluttering, sidelong, projecting, drawn in, and natural.

*Sanchari Dristi* are the moving glances that indicate shyness, shame, grief, fear, doubt, confusion, disgust and suspicion.

*Sthayi Dristi* are kinds of fixed gaze that indicate friendship, truth, pride, anger, mildness, etc.

The movements of the eyebrows accord with the sentiments expressed in the action of the eyeballs. The frown, the raised brows of surprise or fury, the contracted brows of wistfulness, anxiety, pain and anger, the fluttering brows of the erotic mood, enhance the expressions of face, gestures, attitudes and movements of the body.

*Hasta Pran*—the lives of the hands—is beautifully rendered in the Kathakali gesture language. Many kinds of hand action are employed, and often several *hastas* are used successively with rhythmic transition movements to express ideas, portraying action, or movements of animals and birds.

*Fluttering* fingers indicate water, flight of a bee, opening lotus.

*Swinging* the hand by flexing the wrist back and forth, indicates ears of an elephant, flight of a bird, etc.

*Undulating* the hand with wrist movement, indicates a fish, waves, a deer, etc.

*Opening* the hand from a closed position, indicates giving, flower offering, emphasis, etc.

*Releasing* joined fingers indicates speech, emphasis, oath, etc.

*Shaking* the hand indicates anger, river, rising flames, lightning, wings of a bird, etc.

*Cyclic* movement of the hand, with wrist as a pivot, indicates a creeper, mountain, doing, flourishing a weapon, etc.

The feminine mode of dance and *abhinaya* in Kathakali portrays the ideal woman, accomplished in the subtleties of feminine grace and charm which characterize the erotic theme in Kathakali plays. Voluptuous love, heroism, fury, or even the terrific character of a she-demon, are eloquently portrayed in *abhinaya* and dance.

Young boys, who take female roles in Kathakali, do so as a first training and, as they are ambitious to play a masculine Bhima or Arjuna, they look upon the female role as mere time-serving. It is not often that one sees a really convincing impersonation of a feminine character. Certain roles, Urvashi, Panchali, Lalita-Putana and others, are famous as difficult roles requiring dramatic skill of a high order.

Women actresses have not been unknown to Kathakali. A gifted women actress, Kaipancheri Kunhi Malu of South Malabar, appeared in Kathakali dramas and was well known to the writer's Kathakali guru, Ravunni Menon, as a contemporary artist. A troupe of women were known in Malabar for their male and female roles in Kathakali, and their acting was highly appreciated. Nangyar women who took part in the Sanskrit dramas staged in temples were well known for their skill in gesture, *abhinaya* and song.

A number of Malabar girls are taking to Kathakali and the art has recently been introduced into the curriculum of the Raja High School of Kollengode, under the supervision of the Senior Maharani. Both girls and boys study and take part in the Kathakali plays. Two young daughters of prominent families in South Malabar recently acted the roles of Lava and Kusa, the sons of Sita, in a professional Kathakali troupe. Thus the art is being encouraged by the participation of women.

Kathakali no longer enjoys the extensive patronage of Malabar aristocracy, except in a few instances. Many famous experts of Kathakali have passed away and there are few qualified actors to take their place. Young students are not always willing to undergo the prolonged and intense training necessary to become a Kathakali artist.



The eminent poet of Kerala, Vallathol, rescued the art from obscurity more than twenty years ago when he established the Kerala Kalamandalam in Cochin State with funds raised by a lottery. In this school training is being given free to young boys by expert actors, and a troupe is maintained to give plays. At Kotpakal in South Malabar the P. S. V. Natya Sangham established by the late P. S. Varier, maintains a Kathakali training centre and a troupe. In the loving care of such patrons the art is certain to maintain its traditions and contribute to the progress of the dance art of the future.



## CHAPTER XII

### CHHAU DANCE OF SERAIKELLA

Seraikella, in the heart of Singhbhum (land of the Singha) maintains a powerful and imaginative dance art in the Chhau dances of the Chaitra Parva or Spring festival, dedicated to Ardhanarisvara (Ardha-nari)—a composite form of Siva-Sakti half male and half female.

The festival begins with a religious ceremony called Jatra-ghat (the sacred pot) which takes place at the river. A male dancer impersonates Ardha-nari and carries on his head the sacred pot filled with water. He is dressed in red garments and profusely garlanded. His face is painted red and he wears a gold-tinsel diadem.

The preliminary rites are performed by a Tantric priest. A pot filled with consecrated water is placed upon the head of the dancer and firmly fixed. After nightfall the procession begins to move, to the din of drums and *sawai* mingled with shouts of devotees. Ardha-nari dances the ceremonial Jatra-ghat dance along the road bearing the sacred pot, and lighted by flaming brass torches. Naked *bhaktas* prostrate repeatedly on the ground at the feet of the dancer. At the royal palace the Raja and his family receive the priest and the procession halts. Special rites are performed and a goat is sacrificed. *Bhaktas* roll upon a bed of thorns. The procession moves on to the Siva Temple, and after passing thrice around the temple, the final rites are performed. The consecrated pot is buried in the temple, and the previous year's water pot is uncovered to note the amount of water contained. The prediction of climatic conditions affecting crops is then made. The Goddess Kali, dressed in black, takes the place of Ardha-nari in the preliminary rites on the second night of the festival.

The dance festival proper is held in the palace courtyard and continues for four nights in the form of a carnival of masked dances. Each dancer wears a mask called Chhau and this is the reason why the dances are called Chhau (mask) dances. Each mask represents a god or goddess, or other celestial being, a great hero, *rishi*, warrior, demon or spirit, and certain simple characters. Female roles are impersonated by male dancers.

The Raj family of Seraikella have maintained the art for centuries and it is a custom for the young princes to learn

the dances and dance in the Chaitra Parva festival. Raja Aditya Pratap Singha Deo of this family is a great patron of Chhau dances and he has designed many of the finest dance masks.

A huge Shamiana (canopy) is erected in the palace courtyard for the dances. A dais is set up for the Raja and his family and other spectators sit on the ground. Two drummers beat huge *nagara* (kettle drums) with a pair of long sticks to summon the spectators. The sound can be heard for miles.

The orchestra consists of Sanai and drone for melody, and dholes (small drums), two *nagara*, mridanga and cymbals for the rhythms. This is an ideal open-air music for such festival.

On the opening night the youngest dancers of the community are the first to appear. They perform traditional steps and gestures with confidence and grace. They are followed by various trained groups and soloists, of which some of the following dances are notable.

The dance of a priest, waving a lighted lamp and ringing a bell simultaneously is called Arati.

The dance of Narada, the celestial musician, has classic grace and dignity.

Phul Basant is a love duet of a youth and maiden characterized by exuberant joy in the spring season.

The episode of Rishya Sringa and the courtesan, from the Ramayana, the myth of Chandrabhaga, the beautiful maiden, pursued by the Sun God, the erotic Hara Parvati, and the Rani of Jhansi's call to her warriors are some of the attractive dances. The Siva Tandava Dance is inspired by the Siva Tandava Stotram—and other dances are composed from the Sanskrit metres and *Chhandas*. The mode called Suragati is the celestial mode of the Devas. Som Tal is a classical mode with brilliant footwork, elegant gaits and postures.

The most spectacular and vigorous dances are the sword dances. Fighting to rhythm is brought to a high degree of perfection in the Chhau sword dances—Astra Danda. Swords flash and whirl—with steps and attitudes perfectly co-ordinated. The dance begins with an imposing slow stride, and attitudes of watchfulness. Then there is a sudden burst of furious combat, agile and light footed. In days of old, Orissan war dances transformed men into proud and fearless warriors at the time of battle.

The Gada Yuddha, a battle dance with huge maces, portrays the fight between Bhina, the Indian Hercules, and Duryodhana. It begins with a magnificent gait, tiger-like in sinuous grace. Clubs swing to exciting rhythms, and the dance reaches a climax with the defeat of Duryodhana after a grim fight.

Chhau dance technique is based upon 108 Upalayas or dance movements. As the faces of the dancers are masked, the limbs and body convey the mood or dramatic content of the dances. Rhythmic gestures are formal and coincide with the footwork based on metrical formulæ or syllables, like other types of Indian classical dance. Dramatic gestures seem to be stylized natural gestures, gentle or forceful as the theme demands.

The Chhau dances utilize fundamentals of the *Abhinaya Darpana* in their postures and movements. Pada (feet)—Man dala (ten positions), Utplavana (leaps)—Bhramari (turns)—and Padacharika (foot movements) are shown in the basic technique.

The *Gati* is a rhythmic gait and the Chhau dancer is accomplished in a great many of them, Sura-gati being the gait of the gods. Akasa-gati indicates descent of the gods from the sky. The gait of the tiger, the mauling tiger, the lion gait and horse gait are just a few of the many kinds of *Gati* that an accomplished dancer knows.

Other leaps, and turns are called 'catching the moon', a high leap. Alternate kicking of the heels to the pelvis is the 'winnowing fan,' (the classical Krpalaga). A jump with the legs widely separated is 'splitting the bamboo.' A turning leap in the air is the 'jumping of the goat' etc.

There is a keen spirit of competition in these festivals, as prizes are awarded by the Raja for the best dances, masks and costumes. The special significance of the dances lies in the fact that all communities are well versed in Chhau dances and participate in the performances. The cultural heritage of the art is purely Orissan.

The four sons of Raja Aditya Prartap, Suvendra—Suddhundra, Brojendra and Hirendra became expert dancers and participated in the annual *Chaitra Parva*. The handsome Suvendra was famous for his Mayura Dance. Suvendra and Brojendra have both passed away and the *Chhau* dance has lost in them two of its greatest dancers. The Srikala Pitha Dance and Culture Centre of Seraikella have been established in their honour to preserve the art.

The once ruling house of Mayurbhanj adjacent to Seraikella are also patrons of Chhau Dance, but the masks are not worn in the Mayurbhanj dance festival.

Doubtless the Orissan dance art was widespread in the ancient kingdoms of Karnasuvarna, Kalinga and Utkala, the ancient Orissa. With the merging of States into national India, royal patronage cannot now support the dance arts, and the Chhau dances may have a precarious existence unless there is some organized effort to maintain the festivals and establish a school of dancing.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE DANCE OF MANIPUR

Manipur is a small State near the Burma border, encircled by hills. The people of this ancient land claim close ties with India in the past. Arjuna, the handsome hero of the *Mahabharata*, visited Manipur, so the story goes, and fell in love with the Princess Chitrangada, whom he married. They had a son, Babruvahan, and he is mentioned in the *Mahabharata*.

Manipuris are devout worshippers of Lord Krishna. Their *Ras* dance festivals and devotional songs of Vidyapati, Chandidas, and the immortal Jayadeva, are linked to Hindu religious customs and traditions.

The history of Manipur *Ras*, the mystic circular dance of Krishna and the Gopis, goes back in time more than two hundred years to a dream of a ruling prince, Karta Maharaj. He was driven out of Manipur by a usurper and took refuge with the Raja of Assam. Karta Maharaj was asked to prove his royal birth by a feat of strength with an elephant. He had a dream in which Lord Krishna appeared to him and told him to hold a rosary when approaching the elephant. After conquering the animal he was to make an image of Govindji (Krishna) from the wood of the jackfruit tree obtained from the Kaina mountain and install it in a temple in Manipur. The prince did as directed and defeated the elephant. With the help of the Raja of Assam, he led an army to Manipur and reconquered his kingdom. The temple of Govindji was built in Imphal and the sacred image installed.

Lord Krishna then appeared to Karta Maharaj in a vision and revealed his mystic *Ras* dance. Princess Laimalairoibi, the daughter of Karta Maharaj, was the first to dance the role of Radha in the first *Ras* at the temple. Five *Ras* festivals were then implemented to worship Govindji with dance and song in all season. A circular place in front of the temple called the *Ras Mandal* was set apart for the dances. Karta Maharaj is known in Manipur as Bhagyachandra, the father of Manipur *Ras*.

The *Vasant Ras* celebrates the Spring Festival of Holi. Radha, Krishna and the Gopis dance the mystic *Ras Leela* and several episodes of the love-play of Radha and Krishna. The dances go on for the entire night in the moonlight accom-

panied by sacred Kirtan songs, drums and cymbals. The eight *sakhis* who dance with Radha are Lalita, Vishakha, Chitra, Champaklata, Tungavidya, Indurekha, Rangadevi and Sudevi. Each *sakhi* has her own dance theme bearing her name.

The *Ras* dance is wonderfully graceful. One pose seems to merge into another and gestures have a caressing softness like waves lapping the beach or curling spirals of incense smoke. The pervading mood is serene, dreamlike, blissful. In this sublime communion of the *Ras* maidens there is no place for beguiling glances and amorous gestures.

The costume of Radha and her *sakhis* is strangely beautiful. The skrit of green for Radha and red for the Gopis, is richly decorated with sequins and mirrors and stands out stiffly at the hem. The skirt swings in a fascinating manner in the dance and puffs out when the dancer squats. The tight fitting short sleeved bodice outline the slender swaying waist. The transparent bordered white flounce worn over the skirt swirls in undulating waves in the dance. A guaze veil covers head and face, but does not conceal the jewelled knot of hair nor the demure beauty of the face. The Manipur dance costume was seen in the dream-dance of the *Ras* by Karta Maharaj who devised the entire dance ritual. In design the skirt resembles the mirrored and embroidered skirts of the milkmaids of Gujerat. It is entirely foreign to Manipur, where the native dress is a wide cloth wrapped around the body under the armpits.

The Manipur dance is based upon several *parengs* or *talas*. The Brindavan Pareng describes the beauty of Sri Krishna. Khurum Pareng is for the adoration of the divine lovers, Radha and Krishna. Bhangi Pareng contains all the variations of Manipur *Ras*. The Parengs are danced in a certain way and the technical formulæ are precise and restricted. A mistake or change in the sequences of movements and steps is considered inauspicious.

The four basic dance themes that recur in all dances are called *Chali*, one of which is a gyrating step or turn. The finale of a dance sequence is called *Tilai*.

The *Maha-Ras* is danced during Ras Purnima in November.

Gosta Leela or Gosta Asthami takes place on Kartik Ash-tami day in November. Two hundred young boys dressed as Krishna dance together. On this occasion Krishna is taught to feed the cows.

The Moiba dance symbolizes the limbs of the body coming to life.

Sri Gouranga Leela is a dance dedicated to Sri Chaitanya Deva, the Vaishnava saint.

Lai-haroba is a religious dance of worship of Lord Siva, the oldest deity of Manipur.

The intricate rhythms of Manipur dances are played on the Poong, the deep-toned accents on one end of the drum; the more delicate variations on the high pitched drumhead. Each tsep, turn and cadence of the dance is clearly articulated on the drum in perfect unison. Drum dances of men combine drumming with simultaneous dancing in a brilliant display of steps, leaps, squats and turns. The Chauda Madala is a drum dance of fourteen drummers, and the Dhrumal a dance of one hundred drummers. Dressed in white and wearing white turbans, the drummers face each other in two parallel lines and dance in perfect harmony.

Cymbals too add sweet accents to the ensemble of song and drums. The Manjeera are small cymbals played by women in puja dances of. Girls praise the beauty of Radha and Krishna in the dance Jhulan Yatra with cymbals. The Durga Puja dance is also performed with cymbals.

Kartala are large bell-metal convex cymbals played by men who dance the Kartala Cholom cymbal dance in groups. Kartala also accompany solo dance and the singing of Kirtans.

The masculine dance of Manipur has vigour but is never violent. It is elegant, dexterous and refined with leaps, turns and supple gestures.

In the feminine dance the feet are not lifted and the knees are close together when bent and in kneeling positions. Dance gestures are the soft Pataka,—Mukula, flower bud,—Alapallava, the lotus movement,—Kataka, the gracious hand,—and Hamsapaksha, swan wing.

Head movements of the dance are Alolita (rolling), Adhomukha (face inclined), Parivahita (fanwise swing) and Sama (level). The rhythmic movement of the neck called Sundari is not used in the dance.

*Anga abhinaya* or expressive movements of the body convey the mood or state of mind and there is no *Mukha abhinaya* or *Hasta abhinaya* as in South Indian dances. The predominant mood of the dance is Santa (peace). To believe that Santa is beyond the scope of *abhinaya* is a mistake. Love in its supreme aspect is a creative manifestation of the Abso-lute and Santa is the sublimation of Sringar, the first *rasa*,—Santa being the last *rasa*.

The gentle and graceful Lasya was taught to Usha, the daughter of Banasura, by the Goddess Parvati, consort of Siva, according to legend. Usha taught it in turn to the Gopis of Duaraka, who instructed the women of Saurashtra, and in this manner it came into practice in India. This perfect Lasya is remembered by the maids of Manipur though others may have forgotten it.

## CHAPTER XIV

### KATHAK : THE CLASSICAL DANCE OF NORTH INDIA

The ancient Hindu actor was called Kathaka—a story teller. He recited episodes from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* with expository gestures and movements. The Kathak Dance of North India represents a further development of dramatic mime and dance into an elaborate art.

Kathak Dance acquired fame through its chief exponents, Kalka and Bindadin. Their father, Thakur Prasad, was Court Dancer to Nawab Ali Shah of Lucknow. He had learned his art from his father, Prakash Muharaj, who claim to have been taught by a yogi. Prakashji became Court Dancer to Nawab Asafuddaulah of Lucknow. Mughal and Rajput rulers patronized the art and maintained dancers and musicians to entertain them at Court functions.

There are two schools of Kathak : the Lucknow Gharana (school) and the Jaipur Gharana. The Lucknow style gives more importance to *abhinaya* or mime. Intricate dance patterns and rapid spins characterize the Jaipur school. Yet the fundamental technique of both schools is a common dance heritage.

Kathak is highly systematized in both *abhinaya* and pure dance. The rendering of *bhava* or sentiment is depicted in vivid rhythmic pantomime with gestures and postures, and various gaits. Its style is lyrical and romantic, the usual theme being various situations and moods of love. The *Leelas* (Cycles) of Sri Krishna with Radha and the Gopis at Bridavan were immortalized in the poetry and painting of the 16th and 17th centuries in North India, and the Kathak dance reflected the lyric beauty of these contemporary art forms.

The mischievous pranks of Shree Krishna in detaining the Gopis is the subject of Mana Leela.

In Dana Leela Krishna meets the Gopis on their way to Mathura with pots of curds and demands a toll to release them. He behaves as a taunting lover.

Kalahantarita Radha is she who has rebuked her lover severely and feels regret.

Khandita Radha dismisses her lover in angry jealousy.

The *Holi* sprinkling of the Spring Festival is also a subject for pantomimic dance. Krishna and the Gopis squirt coloured water on each other and throw coloured powder.



Kathak is a solo dance with mime. In the dual role of Krishna and Radha the dancer alternately depicts the lover and the beloved, passing with admirable ease from mood to mood and pose to pose. Interpolated pure dance provides a vivid climax to each dramatic theme. Kathak is animated by contrasting emotions and brilliant dance patterns of quick movements and staccato beats of the feet.

Foot rhythms are regulated by basic syllables : called ' *That* ' :

*Ta tai tai tat-a Ta tai tai tat-a*

Footwork is called ' *Tatkar*, '

*Abhinaya* interprets the theme of a song and this is shown by gestures and rhythmic action, in which facial expression plays an important part.

The dance begins with a conventional pose with the right arms raised vertically above the head and the left arm extended horizontally. One foot is crossed behind the other. The head moves rhythmically with *sundari* neck movement while the eyes exhibit *sthayee drishti* in *sringar rasa*. The hands are in *Arala* pose.

This is followed by a preliminary *Torah*, a patterned dance sequence ending with a brilliant finale—and the *namaskar* with *anjali* hands. (In the Muslim courts the salutation was a ' *salami* ' with one hand).

The *Torah* is based upon rhythmic syllables such as :

*Ta-tu ta-ran-ga ta ka-ten-tun.....*

combining rhythmic gestures with foot rhythms and usually ending in a series of fast turns accented by the *faet*, on which bells are tied.

The *Paran* is a verse describing an incident of Radha or Krishna play with the Gopis, in the form of a recitation and supported by rhythmic syllables. The *Paran* is danced with gestures and *abhinaya* in strict rhythm and usually ends with a pure dance sequence or finale of rapid turns called *Chukra*.

Religious themes also find expression in the *Stotras* describing the appearance and activities of various deities. They are vigorous and dramatic with striking poses. The accompanying *mridanga* or *pakhwaj* with its deep tone like distant thunder adds grandeur to the exposition.

The various kinds of rhythmic progression or travelling steps are called *Gat*. *Gat bhao* is a rhythmic gait combined with *abhinaya*. *Gat* is usually a lyrical sequence expressing gentle grace and rhythm and links the various parts of the dance together.

Kathak, more than any other classical dance, has suffered a loss of pure form. Its poetic quality and its gesture language have almost disappeared. Debasement and vulgarity were introduced to satisfy the taste of a degenerated nobility. *Baijis*, professional dancing and singing girls, utilized *abhinaya* and dance poses to attract admirers and cared little for art. Male Kathak dancers concentrate on exhibiting their skill in performing complicated dance sequences, and rapid turns to astound spectators and defeat rivals. There is a point at which a dance becomes too complicated and rapid to retain either grace or beauty of form. And the complicated gymnastics exhibited by certain Kathaks to show their mathematical skill in rapid footwork has all but destroyed the classical beauty of Kathak dance.<sup>1</sup> The usual performance consists of a recitation of a mathematical formula by the dancer, which he then executes, and a repetition of the same procedure—which cannot be called dancing.

The survival of Kathak dance owes much to the devotion of two great *gurus* of the past, Janaki Prasad of Jaipur and Thakur Prasad of Lucknow, who re-established the art in Delhi after a period of decline. Their descendants are the experts of the Lucknow and Jaipur schools of to-day. Shambu Maharaj, Lachu Maharaj, and the late Achhan Maharaj belong to the Lucknow Gharana; Sunder Prasad, Sohanlal, and the late Jailal Maharaj to the Jaipur Gharana.

One cannot leave this subject without mention of the late Menoka Sokhey, a dancer of Bombay, who presented ballets in pure Kathak technique. She successfully presented group and duet dancing in Kathak style and her performances were noted for grace and classic line. Among her disciples are Damayanti Joshi, Shevanti and Kumudini, well known professional dancers.

The writer is also indebted to Rang Vittal, who studied at her school, for some of the fine points of distinction between the classic and the popular renderings of the Kathak dance.

<sup>1</sup> 'In the Allahabad Music Conferance in 1937, held during the Dewali holidays, a female Kathak dancer in course of her demonstration whirled at such a terrific speed that the spectators saw that she had two heads.—Ed.

## CHAPTER XV

### RACE-SPIRIT AND THE DANCE

In the East art has been developed and sustained through the ages by pure devotion. The Hindu attitude towards art as an expression of the Inner Beauty or Divine in man has brought it into close connection with religion.

In the West, the gradual dissociation of art and the church has led to the development of a predominantly secular art-expression which, while it may claim for itself the lofty idealism of a Wagner or a Scriabin, or the spiritual purity of a Passion Play performance, finds its popular appeal in pandering to a restless, pleasure-seeking public which pays homage to the exalted conceptions of art, but prefers its frivolous entertainment.

Large cities, the centres of industrialism, especially in America, set the theatrical fashions including dancing. Most city folk are aggressively engaged in the struggle for existence or the acquirement of wealth. They seek diversion and forgetfulness in the thrills of spectacular entertainment where music is loud and dancers present their snappiest and most astonishing steps, bringing to their aid acrobatic devices of every conceivable sort. Here there is no opportunity for intimacy, authenticity or simplicity. If the dance expressions of various nations are recruited into the theatre, it is very often for the sake of novelty or exoticism which disregards almost entirely the true spirit of authenticity of the original dance.

There are an ever-increasing number of dancers in the West who feel that dancing has a higher function than to furnish pastime-antics to an amusement-seeking public. For these dancers the ancient dances of the East have a deeper meaning than the mere outward expression of exotic patterns.

The dances of various races offer a rich field for terpsichorean research to honest and sincere disciples. The dance expressions of different races or nations are in a sense *race modes* or the plastic embodiment of a *race-spirit*.

The writer recalls an occasion when folk dances were presented by many national groups. There was a charming Swedish folk dance, in which girls and their swains participated. Here the vital race-spirit of Scandinavia was expressed with a vigour and swing that conveyed more in a few moments

than many books could have told. The simultaneous beat of their feet on the ground had in it a joyous earth-sense which was expressive of the rhythm of Nature itself. There was no philosophy nor symbolism in the minds of these lithe young people. Their spirit of rhythm and exaltation was natural and without artifice. But the race-spirit of generations shone through their smiles and postures in a way that one could never forget.

Another dance by a group of Mexican Indians permitted a glimpse into their spirit. This dance was associated with the sowing of corn, and the primitive dress and descriptive gestures of the dancers had a quaint and simple charm. At one place in the dance they all gave a little hop and a peculiar shout which was fascinating. These were simple children of the soil who loved the warm sun and the smell of the earth. The Mexican dance was primitive but it was performed with a devotional joy that made of it a *rite*.

The dances of the ancients were essentially a sacred rite. In India, where all forms of art were united to religion, the art of representing the inner experience of the human soul found its highest expression in music and dancing. The arts of India are a revelation of many thousands of years of culture and civilization. The Hindu conception of the dance, as the visible representation of the mystic rhythm of the Universe, is in a sense symbolic of the *race-spirit* of India, that land grown old in wisdom, and the ways of life when the "*West*" was not yet born.



## CHAPTER XVI

### RENAISSANCE OR RECESSION ?

In ancient India, the dance had a significant place in the life of the people, in temples and festivals and in the courts of ruling princes. The traditions of the art were handed down for centuries until, with the vanished wealth and splendour of temples and palaces, dancing fell into neglect and was condemned for many years.

An awakened interest in the dance began more than thirty years ago when Poet Rabindranath Tagore presented his lyrical dramas of dance, poetry and music, colourfully blended in impressive stage plays. The poet toured India with his young dance disciples, students of Shantiniketan, his own art-centre. He brought to the stage for the first time young Bengali girls and boys of respectable families. It was the dance of Manipur that enchanted the poet with its passive serenity, soft cadences of the hands and swaying movements. Manipur dance became the life and soul of his lyrical dramas under the expert guidance of Manipur dance masters. Even today the Tagore songs may be charmingly danced in Manipur style.

Interest in the dance was further stimulated by the discovery of Kathakali dance-drama outside of Malabar, when the vivid gesture language and dance-modes of Kathakali were first presented in Bombay by the writer, with Gopinath and her troupe, in 1933. This was the beginning of a wider appreciation of Kathakali dance-drama, in which every kind of action, emotion and imaginative theme is depicted.

The social stigma that banished Devadasis from temples years ago in South India, was successfully overcome through the initial efforts of Srimati Rukmini Devi of the Theosophical Society at Adiyar, Madras. She herself learned the art and danced in public. She also started classes in Devadasi Nritya at Adyar. Eventually the dance of the Devadasis found a secure place in the art-life of Madras under a new name, "Bharata Natyam", and girls of respectable families began to study dancing as an accomplishment. Bharata Natyam has now become an art of upper class society in Madras.

Of those born to Devadasi tradition, Balasaraswati and Jayalakshmi have been outstanding exponents of Bharata Natyam within the last twenty years.

Kathak dance of North India found in Menaka Sokhey, a devoted protagonist of traditional style. Her ballets revealed the inherent beauty of Kathak technique in ensemble dances and dramatic duets.

Four significant forms of Indian dance were brought to the stage in the 1930s under artistic leadership,—each having its own distinctive style and technique. They reveal a mastery over fundamental techniques which long discipline and devotion have achieved. The technical resources of these classical forms of dance are almost inexhaustible.

There has been some controversy among dancers and critics in India as to whether men should perform Bharata Natyam and woman should perform Kathakali. Male dancers will say that Kathakali is too strenuous for women. But actually the feminine mode is not strenuous, and even vigorous characterizations such as the Goddess Kali or a she-demon are ably handled by women. Bharata Natyam requires as vigorous a physical discipline as Kathakali, though its style is more elegant. The impersonation of female characters by boys in Kathakali and other forms of dance-dramas is quite common. So also the performance of male dances by women is not unknown to Kathakali.

The dancer, Madhavi, heroine of the Tamil classic, Silappadikaram (2nd century A.D.) performed a number of masculine dances. Among these may be mentioned the Kodukotti dance of Siva on the cremation ground with his consort Maha Kali; the Panduranga dance of Siva, figuring as his own consort; the Alliya dance of Vishnu as Krishna when he destroyed the demon Kamsa; the Mallu dance of Vishnu, as Krishna, after he destroyed the demon Bana, etc.

It is one thing to see male dancers impersonate women in dress and dance movements, and it is quite another thing to see male dancers in male attire performing in an effeminate manner the purely feminine movements of Bharata Natyam.

There are traditional techniques for male dancers available in the Bhagavata Mela Natakam of Melatur, as well as in the Kuchipudi system, in a Bharata Natyam style that may be called Uddhata or stately masculine dance. It would be a great help to the progress of the dance if male dancers would take course in the Bhagavata Mela Natakam and the Kuchipudi of Andhra, and bring to the stage a true masculine version of Bharata Natyam. It would be equally helpful if women dancers would learn the feminine modes of Purrapadu and Todayam, and present these Kathakali dances in harmony with male dancers. Thus might the artistic balance of male and female movement be maintained in the dance-drama,—and replace to

some extent the disgusting dances of stage and film in which girls dress as boys and wear moustaches, and boys impersonate girls.

Now that India is free and rapid social and economic changes are taking place, the traditional dances are being neglected by dancers in the cities, who, with eyes turned westward, favour new, 'modern' forms of dance, to keep in step with the times. A modern dance movement has sprung up which proposes to devise new forms of dance by borrowing freely any movement or pattern from any traditional mode to 'create' new dances. The gap between tradition and new forms seems to be an ever-widening one, except for Bharata Natyam which continues to hold its own against the tide of dance productions and 'variety dances' of stage and films with their meaningless mixture of styles and techniques.

Arnold Haskell, the great English dance, critic, said, in his book on ballet : "Ballet is essentially an art of tradition, a tradition that is a living force. Music has its score, the drama its book, and paintings of the past can be seen on the walls of museums. Ballet enjoys no such advantage. The tradition is handed down from master to master. Cease dancing for twenty years and the damage might well be beyond repair."

Tradition is not a hindrance, but a help in the progress of art. The surviving forms of traditional dance in India offer the only true basis for further progress, unlimited in possibilities for those who are sincere disciples of the dance art.

## APPENDIX

### I. INDIAN MUSIC

The ideals of art in India in the past reached a stage of excellence far above the present world standards. Especially is this true of the art of music and dancing which ancient India considered the life and soul of religion.

I have stated elsewhere that dancing is always in unison with music. It is said in "Sangeeta Narayana"—*Nrityam Badyanugam Proktam Badyam Geetanubarti Cha*,—"Dancing follows instrumental music, and music follows singing" A famous art critic observes : "Song is sustained in the throat. Its meaning is shown by the hands, the mood by the glances and the rhythm marked by the movement of the feet, that is dance. For wherever the hands move, thither the glances follow ; where the glances go, there the mind follows ; where the mind travels, there the mood forms itself, and where it happens to condense itself, there wells up the æsthetic emotion or *rasa* to overflow its corporeal confines, to touch with love-tinctured zeal of humanity at all points."

Another distinguished critic aptly puts it : "The soul of the *Sadhaka* passes from speech to song and then flows forth into the petalled harmony of dance, the transparent gesture-language, when even song fails to realise its desired ends. Thought crystallises into emotion which bursts forth in the ecstasy or radiant gesture-codes, the mysterious symbology of limbs and poses."<sup>1</sup>

Hindu music was based upon the fundamental understanding that the law of sound is eternal and unchangeable. Tones were then conceived to belong to the evolving life of sound, and the "Ragas" were in reality true modes of sonants based

<sup>1</sup> *Angenalam nayet gitam hastenartham  
pradarsayet  
Chaksurbhyam bhabayet bhavam  
padabhyam talamadiset.*

—"Pundarika Vitthala."

"The gestures of the body shall inspire the song, the meaning shall be expounded by the finger-plays of the hands, the two eyes shall express the feelings, and the actions of the feet shall dictate the sway of the rhythm."



upon the absolute type of relationship furnished by the harmonic series.

But music is an elusive art, and the Eastern musician, like his Western brother, has fallen under the influence of the music corruption which has perverted the true basis of the ancient modes. The West has copied and distorted the ancient canons of music to suit modern requirements; and music has lost its relationship to the natural law of sound-evolution by the adoption of equal temperament.

In India also we find a system of twelve semi-tones taking the place of the twenty-two *srutis* (in theory at least). There is a growing tendency to adopt some features of the Western system of writing down music. Doubtless, there are many in India who look upon these reforms as progressive. But they do not realise that they are helping along the perversion of Hindu music which the harmonium has already begun.

The Hindu musician is essentially a "creator" of melodic improvisation, because, having mastered and memorised the essential formulas and mnemonics of his art, he is allowed to weave melodic patterns to suit his innermost desire.

This is not possible for the Western musician who is shackled to a written score to which he must conform without deviation. Western music is committed to a system of harmony which allows very little melodic development.

The function of the oral musical traditions of Indians is to develop the creative ability of the artist. "Melody is the life of music," says Darius Milhaud, the eminent French composer, in "The North American Review."

"What gives life to a work, what makes it true, will never be its characteristics, polytonal or atonal, but rather its essential melody. Thence springs its real power, because it comes straight from the heart of the musician. There is no training so complete or so thorough that it can suffice without that melodic source. It is the primary element, the authentic, organic one, that comes from the pure sentiment itself and that is conducive to rhythmical and harmonic design. Without melody, all composing will fail or end in vain rhetoric, quite conventional and empty. It is the entire secret of music, which I found out one day when I was studying at the conservatoire with my master, Andre Gedalge. I was showing him some vast symphonic plan or other and he said to me: "Just write for me eight measures that can be played without any accompaniment."

"Melody is thus our aim and greatest ambition. It alone will allow us to work by our imagination and yet keep close to the tradition which we feel to be ours."

How much more important is the realization of true melody for Hindu musicians ! Written scores can never convey the full musical meaning of the " Ragas." Such can only be acquired from oral instruction. Musical formulas are but the merest outlines of melody. They convey only the essential basic technique and nothing of the subtle beauty of music which the Hindu musician liberates only from within. When he has mastered the melodic and rhythmic formulas, when he has translated the oral traditions imparted by his *guru* into a musical experience which becomes the very essence of his own being, only then is he a true musician and a creator of music.

The attempt to write the subtlety of Hindu music into scores or notations usurps the functions of oral teaching and memory training, and will in time rob the art of the vitality by which it lives. To argue that there should be a universal musical language is as futile as to try to convert the world to one religion or one language. Neither is desirable.

Rudimentary music, theory and the mnemonics of instrumental music and ' tal ' should be written down in the Hindu manner for purposes of record and to aid the memory only. But the advanced and intricate technique of Hindu music should be taught only by the master musicians, at whose feet the disciple should learn his art.

Vocal music has always been of first importance in India, because the human voice was considered a divine instrument, having the energizing motive force of soul fire. Certainly, the voice is able to express the gamut of human emotion more divinely than any other instrument. Singing is more than music ; it is the expression of the emotional depth and internal vigour of the individual and involves a full psychological and physical release.

The Hindus were doubtless the first race to perfect the vocal art, and to realize in their sacred chants and later through the " Ragas," the highest fulfilment of the true art of singing.

If there is to-day any living testimony to the high vocal attainment of the past, it is the beautiful *Tambura*—the perfect instrument for the singer. Who but an adept could have fashioned it ! It brings the sense of peace and repose so essential to natural and free vocal expression. It gives the power of liberation to the voice by its sonorous reiteration. It is the sea of sound on which the tones of the singer rise and fall like waves, and glide one into another. And it is the only instrument by which the singer should practise and perfect his art.

## WHAT ARE SRUTIS ?

*Srutis* (microtones or enharmonic tones) are the life and soul of Indian Music. It is very difficult to define *sruti*. But "Sangeet Ratnavali" says that a *sruti* "is formed by the smallest intervals of the sound perceivable by the ear." There are twenty-two *srutis* in the scale of Indian music. "Every distinct audible sound is a *sruti* ; it is so called because it is to be heard by the ear. Indian musical tones are produced by *srutis* which arise from heart, throat and head." "The scales are formed from the *srutis*, four *srutis* being allotted to a major tone, three to a minor (which would appear to have been of a pitch somewhat flatter than the tone and sharper than the semi-tone..... .."

Mr. Jehanbax B. Vatcha writing on the merits of a recent book on the 22 *srutis* of Indian music, referred to my research in the following words: "Pandit Firoze has not solved the *Sruti* problem on his own theory like Ragini Devi and other scholars, but he has strictly adhered to what has been written in ancient Sanskrit works of the sage Bharata and Sarangadeva." The actual statement which Tarapore<sup>2</sup> made regarding my musical research in his lucid article on Indian music was as follows: "Ragini Devi....who has devoted several years to the study of the problem, has devised a scale of twenty-two notes which she produces on a Sonometer according to a theory of her own founded on Sastric data." No claims were made that I had solved the problem, nor do I so claim. I have based my theory partly on Sastric data, gathered from Vedic sources as well as from the writings of Bharata and Sarangadeva. It remains for expert opinion in India and the West, to decide the fate of all such theories with regard to Indian music. If Pandit Firoze Framjee is the "first to deserve credit for this research," I sincerely hope that he attains the recognition which he so rightly deserves. The title of his book "*Sruti* Mystery Solved" gives expectations of a flood of light on the hidden mystery of the *srutis*.

Practical musicians of India have relied chiefly upon musical intuition and traditional practice for their Raga scales and intonations. Certain famous musicians of the past evolved a simple method of measurement of the Veena wire for placing the twelve important frets on the Veena. By shifting

<sup>2</sup> Vide *The Times of India*, Bombay, September 5, 1936.

the frets and by the use of *meend* (deflection of the musical wire) along the fret, all the *srutis* could be produced as required.

By this means, too, music could be taught on the practical side without actually imparting the sacred knowledge of the nature and origin of the 22 *srutis*. The secretiveness of ancient Brahmin musicians may be largely responsible for the loss of accurate scientific data on the *srutis*.

Centuries later, when musicians tried to restore music to a scientific basis, they began dividing the musical wire according to the simple fractions:  $\frac{8}{9}$ ,  $\frac{4}{5}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$  etc. Since then the traditional intonations and the theory have never been quite reconciled and the dispute continues to this very day.

It was after the beginning of the Christian era that the idea of the *interval* as a musical unit seems to have permeated the musical theory of India. It is not at all unlikely that both Bharata (500 A. D.) and Sarangadeva (1200 A.D.) were influenced and perhaps confused by contacts with different musical theories than they knew, both ancient and contemporary. The theory and practice described in these great *Sastras* include much data that belonged to a remote period and quotes authorities whose works on music have never been discovered.

It is known that ancient Hindu musical modes were *descending* and that certain notes of the scale i.e., *Sa* (Shadaja), *Ga* (Gandhara) and *Ni* (Nishad) had different functions in the scales than those they afterwards acquired as the names of scale notes in the newer ascending gamut of seven notes (*Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni*.) based upon the ascending harmonic series of which *Sa* (Shadaja) was finally considered to be the prime or fundamental. The ancient *Ni* (Nishad) was first described as the starting note of the scale (descending), while *Sa* (Shadaja) was called the fourth note. The two musical systems involved different systems of tuning, technique and practice.

Various scholars in India have deduced a theory of twenty-two *intervals* to the octave for which they claim the authority of "Natyasastra" and "Sangit Ratnakar." This 22-*sruti* scale allots nine *srutis* to the interval *Sa-Ma* (ratio 4 : 3) and thirteen *srutis* to the interval *Sa-Pa* (ratio 3 : 2) with nine *srutis* from *Pa* to the higher octave *Sa*, altogether 22 *intervals*. The *srutis* are apportioned to the scale notes as follows: Whole tone 4 *srutis*, minor tone 3 *srutis*, semi-tone 2 *srutis*. Further sub-divisions are computed in several ways.

The traditional *srutis* are actually being sung and played by modern Indian musicians who, perhaps fortunately, know little or nothing about the physics of sound, intervals, vibrations



etc., but simply rely upon the oral traditions and intonations bequeathed to them for generations.

The Indian musician sings or plays the *interval* as much as he does the 'note' and in thus gliding between notes he maintains a continuous musical flow to the accompaniment of the resonant drone or *keynote*. Against this sustained key-note, all the fine gradations of tone are clearly discernible and accuracy of pitch is assured.

Ancient systems of music never separated notes from the evolving life of sound, but reintegrated their scale notes into the natural growth of sound, a certain group of tones, thus conceived constituting a mode.

The scientific acoustic principles embodied in the exquisite Indian musical instruments with their rich overtones, are a living testimony to the fact that ancient India knew the laws of sound (*Nada*), and applied them to music.

To bring the subject of sub-tones, and microtones up to date, it is interesting to note that experiments with quarter-tones, eight tones and even sixteen tones, as well as with the entire substances of sound itself, have been made during the last few years by an ever-increasing number of musicians, composers, and acousticians. Accounts of several of these experiments will serve as an indication of what we may expect in the future development of Western music.

A young Russian, M. Wischnegradsky, has invented a special piano having three keyboards, one of which is composed entirely of quartertones,—bases for special chords and entirely new scales. The inventor believes that before the present notation system of the West, music was a fluid thing and that then people heard many tones which in ordinary notation have been left out.

Another attempt to produce new scales is that of Senor Julian Carillo, a Mexican violinist and composer, who introduced to New York City several years ago a new microtonal system called the *Thirteenth Sound*,—the name symbolizing the moment in which the twelve-tone system was broken. This system which produces as many as 97 different sounds in one octave, received its technical sanction when the eminent Conductor, Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Symphony performed Senor Carillo's microtonal Concertino for violin, violin-cello, French horn, 'arpa-citara,' octavina and guitar, read from *new score* in which keys, notes, flats, sharps, and naturals were not used.

Alois Haba, the Czechoslovakian composer has originated written notes to express microtones which are quarter sharps

quarter flats, three-quarter sharps and three quarter flats, and has invented a special piano for playing them.

*Ether Wave Music*, which created a stir in New York, is the invention of Leon Theremin, a Russian musician, who produces a new kind of music based on unheard-of scales, by merely waving his hands in graceful curves and sweeps in front of his electrical musical apparatus. "What can be freer," he asks, "than the movement of hands in empty space to produce beautiful sounds?" By freeing the musician from physical contact with strings, keys or mouthpieces, Theremin believes that he has given something akin to psychic freedom

And there is Joerg Mager, the Bavarian organist, who has invented an electrical instrument with three keyboards, run by motor, called the *Sphaerophon*. Joerg Mager has explored the 'ocean of new tones' and demonstrates the union of many families of tones and the smooth transition from one family of tones to another. He is interested in the ancient Greek scale of 24 tones, and highly appreciates the music of Arabia and India which he believes will have astounding influences on the music of the future.

Ordinary concepts of harmony are being more and more altered, and no one can predict what the future will evolve in this direction. All chromatic tones, and even all imaginable chords are now inserted into every major and minor key. Chords of the seventh, ninth, eleventh and thirteenth bring to music new *dissonant* effects. Living composers are using a more radical idiom every day, and dissonances and modernisms of all sorts, such as use of all twelve notes of the scale at once, and the striking of the piano keyboard with the whole palms and even forearms.

In jazz too the taste for strong melodic dissonances is evident in the frequent use of glissandos, portamentos and out-of-tune effects. In the higher range, of the trumpet, where overtones lie closer together than semitones, glissandos are effectively introduced in jazz music.

The "massive resources of orchestration" are being "harnessed" until orchestras swell in size and become like "monsters, devouring the life of musicians and of music itself."

While the West is in the process of creating and assimilating new theories and methods in modern music, this is hardly the time for D'Souza<sup>3</sup> to recommend the ordinary conventions

<sup>3</sup> *Vide The Times of India, Bombay, 9-9-36*

of harmony and staff notation for Indian music, which is already the quintessence of *melodic dissonance*, and as such, of great interest to modern musicians. Indian musicians are astonishingly adept at producing glissando and rhythmic effects far in advance of anything that Europe can hope to produce for some time to come.

Since the above was written my attention was drawn to the report published in *The Statesman*, Calcutta, dated 23rd July, 1961, that Arthur Moore had launched a new keyboard scale for pianos, which is adaptable to the Indian scale with twenty-two *srutis* and consequently produces quarter-tones. Moore claimed perfect octaves and himself wrote as follows on his keyboard and the 22 *srutis* of Indian music\* :—

"I have been working on a possible adaptation of my improved keyboard 12-note scale to Indian music's 22-note scale. In Bach's day the fundamental tonic to which all other notes were relative was C. Nowadays in the Western international scale the fundamental tonic is, more sensibly, A, the first letter. Middle A is 220-440.

I have attempted a solution of this into quarter tones to correspond to India's 22 *srutis*, and hope that Indian experts may find means of testing it. The vibrations are as follows :

A	A Sharp	A double Sharp	B flat	B	B Sharp			
220	224.888	229.777	234.666	247.5	253			
C flat	C	C Sharap	D flat	D	D Sharp	E flat	E	
258.5	264	275	286	297	309.375	319.6875	330	
E Sharp	F flat	F	F sharp	G flat	G	G Sharp	A flat	A
341	346.5	352	371.25	384	396	412.5	426.25	440

These 22 *srutis* yield a large number of mathematically exactly perfect Fifths, Fourths etc, all with perfect octaves. Other notes are close approximations, corresponding to the Greek Pythagorean "musical comma" (80/81), which the human ear tolerates. For my solution of the Western keyboard problem Messrs Boosev and Hawkes provided me with a set of 12 pocket tuning-forks one for each of my notes. For the Indian scale this is a difficulty to be surmounted.

In Europe many people have old pianos based on a lower C than the new international C. 256, the classical middle C of Beethoven. The strings of these would snap if a tuner tried to raise them to the international pitch. But there is no difficulty in tuning them to my scale at the correspondingly lower level e.g. A 213.333 ; B 240 : F 341.333 : G 384 ; etc. etc.

\* *The Statesman*, 21. 8. 61.

## II. SANSKRIT LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT

The *Achinaya-Darpanam*, a thirteenth-century textbook ascribed to Nandikesvara sets forth the following standard of the personal charm and equipment of a dancer ;

*Tanvi rupavati syama pinonnatapayodhara  
Pragalbha sarasa kanta kusala graha-mokshayoh  
Visala-lochana gita-vadya-talanuvartini  
Parardhya-bhuska-sampanna prasanna-mukha-pankaja  
Evamvadhya-gunopeti nartaki samudrita. (23-25)*

"She should be slender-bodied, beautiful, young, with full round breasts, self-confident, witty, pleasing, knowing well when to begin (a dance) and when to stop, having large eyes, able to perform in accompaniment of vocal and instrumental music, and to observe the proper time-beats, having splendid dresses and possessing a happy countenance. A girl having all these qualifications is called a dancer (*patra*).—(Dr. M. M. Ghosh's translation).

According to Sanskrit treatises the complex apparatus of Hindu dance has got four important parts: *Karanas* or combined movement of hands and feet, *Angaharas* or combination of the *Karanas*, *Rechakas* or flexions of neck, waist, hands and feet, and lastly, *Pindibandha* or finished figures developing out of particular pieces performed by groups of dancers.

Says Bharata: "The combined (movement of) hands and feet in dance is called the Karana : Two Karanas will make one Matraka, and two, three or four Matrakas will make up one Angahara. Three Karanas will make a Kalapaka, four a Sandaka (or Mandaka,) and five a Sanghataka. Thus the Angaharas consist of six, seven, eight or nine Karanas....."<sup>1</sup>

Bharata describes one hundred and eight Karanas, thirty-two Angaharas, four Rechakas and four varieties of Pindibandhas or Pindis.

*Nrityyabhinaya* is classified into four distinct types : *Angik*

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Manomohan Ghosh's translation of *Natyasastra* ch. IV 30-34.



or gestures of the limbs, *Vachik* or soft murmur in the background through song or recitation, *Aharya* or the costume and make-up and *Sattvika*, the harmonious expression of all the moods. *Bhavas* are composite emotions and *Havas* are emotions depicted through movements. There are three kinds of *Bhavas* : *Sthayi* (dominant), *Vyabhichari* (transitory) and Temperamental. There are eight *Sthayi Bhavas* and thirty-three *Vyabhichari Bhavas*.

Chapters IV, VI, VII-X of the *Natyasastra* respectively deal with the following topics in details: The Class Dance, The Sentiment, *Bhavas*, Emotional and other States, The Gestures, of the Minor Limbs, The Gestures of Hands and The Gestures of other limbs.

Sarangadeva also treats of various aspects of *Nartana* in the last chapter of his *Sangeeta Ratnakara* entitled "Nritya-dhyaya." He deals *inter alia* with nineteen motions of the head, twenty-four *Asamyuta* and thirteen *Samyuta Hastas*, five movements of the chest, five of the flanks, five of the waist, thirteen of the feet, five of the shoulders, nine of the neck, sixteen of the arms, twenty-four of the *Vartanas*, four of the stomach, five of the thighs, ten of the calves, five of the wrist, five of the knee, eight of the eyes, eight *Sthayi Bhava* varieties of glances, seven of the eye-brows, nine of the eye-lids, nine of the eye-balls, sixteen of the cheeks, six of the nose, nine of the breath, ten of the lips, eight of the teeth, six of the tongue, eight of the chin, six of the face, thirty-six *Utpluti Karanas* not mentioned by Bharata, four kinds of *Mukha Raga*, fifteen free motion of the hand, sixteen *Angaharas* of *Trayasa* variety etc. etc.

In Chapter IX and X of the *Natyasastra* Bharata speaks of twenty-four gestures of single hands (*asamyuta hastas*), thirteen of combined hands (*Samyuta hastas*), the four *Karanas* of the hands, ten movements of arms, five kinds of the breast movements, five kinds of the two sides, three kinds of movements of the waist, five of the thigh, five of the shank and five of the feet.<sup>2</sup>

The following *Sloka* from *Sangeeta Ratnakara* emphasises the importance of gesture-language in Hindu dance :

*Netra-bhru-mukha-ragadi rupangai rupavrimhitah  
Pratyongaischa karah karyaḥ rasa bhava pradarsakah*

<sup>2</sup> *Abhinayadarpanam* treats of the following gestures : Head (9), eyes (8), neck (4), *asamyuta hastas* (32), *samyuta hastas*, (23), besides gestures for representing gods, ten *Avataras* of Vishnu different castes, various relations, nine planetary deities and *hastas* for dance in general, and the method of moving hands in dance.

According to classical treatises sixty-four *hastas* are used in Kathakali dance. There are three kinds of Kathakali gestures—Prakritik (natural), Pratihari (imitative) and Prasrita (amplified). In Kathakali there are thirteen movements of the head, thirty-six kinds of glances, eight kinds of looks, nine movements of the eye-ball, nine of the eye-lids, seven of the eye-brows, six of the nose, six of the cheek, six of the lower lip, six of the chin, six of the mouth, four of the face and nine of the neck.<sup>3</sup>

Those who are acquainted with the moods of the heart should use the hands with due care," says *Abhinaya Darpanam* of Nandikesvara, "the movement of whose body is the world, whose speech is the sum of all language, whose jewels are the moon and stars, the Ocean of Compassion, who reveals the meaning of the Laws of Dancing."

The hands in dance are as the voice of the singer or speaker. As Irene Mawer so aptly puts it :<sup>4</sup> "They must play upon the vision and the imagination of an audience ; in their silent movements must be laughter and tears, passion, command, love and hatred, every emotion of which the human heart is capable. They are as the tools of the craftsman, the brush of the painter, the instrument of the musician, the pen of the poet. They are, with the eyes, the most poignant medium of expression in the whole of that wonderful mechanism, the human body. They are also among those manifestations of the soul which raise mankind above the patient, prisoned beasts, for with his hands man weaves and creates, and woman tends, garners and heals. From time immemorial man has prayed with his hands, loved, hunted, worked and played, destroyed and recreated the world in art by the strength and subtlety of his hands."

Says Nandikesvara in the *Abhinaya Darpanam* :

*Yato hastastato dristiryato dristi stato manah  
Yato mana stato bhavo yato bhavastato rasah*

"Where the hand is, there the eye must go ; where the eye goes the mind must follow ; and the object contemplated by the mind must bring out the natural and appropriate feelings : herein lies the sentiment of action."

<sup>3</sup> Vide *The Art of Kathakali* by A. C. Pandeya.

<sup>4</sup> Vide *The Use of the Hands in Mime*—"The Dancing Times," December, 1928.

### III. THE KOM DANCE OF MANIPUR

Pareschandra Das-Gupta and Minendranath Basu write in the *Calcutta Review*, August, 1935 :—

"The Kom is an unknown primitive tribe, inhabiting the hilly tract of Manipur. Like other per-literate human groups they live in isolated settlements far away from the reach of modern civilization. They live a simple life, following with religious regularity the customs and practices of their forefathers. This people are so much controlled by the precedents of the past that there is little chance of intellectual evolution, the primary condition of which is the freedom of thought and will. The entire life of the savage is ridden by superstitions and there is very little scope for the development of individuality. From the religious affairs down to the details of daily life the aborigines are to follow the examples of their forefathers. This extreme reverence for the past, orthodox conservatism of the society is inimical to the progress and welfare of the people and always tends to degeneration and stagnancy. But still it would be quite wrong to suppose that these primitive people are really without their pleasures. On the contrary, this pre-literate or illiterate humanity seems to be buoyed up with joy of youth amidst the servility to the traditions of the past. They seem to enjoy a blissful freedom in their games and dances, which also reflect their aesthetic ideas to no less extent.

Though quite primitive in other respects the Kom people seem to have developed in respect of the art of dancing. The Kom people are very fond of dancing and all the religious and social ceremonies are accompanied with various sorts of dancing and merry-making. The Kom dances are mainly of three types :—

(A) *The hunting dance*.—When a band of youthful Kom hunters return from the forest with the spoils there takes place in the village a dancing ceremony. This type of dancing is very simple but at the same time full of art and elegance. The young hunters with their spears raised aloft in the right hand and the shield held in the left stand in a file. Now the drum begins to beat aloud and the blowpipe (they use a native type made by their own men) fills the air with enchanting music. The hunters then begin to move the body right and left, now raising the spear and then lowering it down, imitating the postures of hunting. A few minutes after, the whole gang begins to move forward slowly, taking their steps with a slow and manly gait and moving rhythmically right and left along with the beats of the drum. In the hunting dance the

women are not allowed to take part. They simply supply glasses of Zu (a country-made wine) to the dancing bachelors.

(B) *Love-dance*.—This type of dance is generally executed by the unmarried women of the village, though there is no restriction for the married women to join them. This dance may be performed by a single woman individually or 3 or 4 of them taking part at the same time. Of all the Kom dances this type is the most elegant and really indicative of high art. Though it is said to be the love dance still there is not the least sex-suggestion. The woman stands in the middle of the dancing arena which is generally an open ground encircled by the enamoured bachelors, and slowly moves her lower limbs in harmony with the musical accompaniment. She raises her legs one after another and moves one pace forward and half a pace backward, rhythmically bending the upper part of her body slightly to the right, slightly to the left alternating with the movement of the lower limb. The hands are raised up forming a circle at the level of the head, with the palms stretched almost to meet one another. The palms are moved alternately so as to represent the movements of the waves. But what makes the whole thing all the more artistic is that the hands have little movements, while the lower limbs of the body and the palms are rhythmically moving to the tune of the blowpipe. The real charm and beauty of this dance are beyond all description. The woman in her dance appears almost like the budding branch of a flower plant waving slowly to the breath of the southern air.

(C) The third type is a religious dance and is performed only on special occasions. Here also the musical accompaniment is almost the same and the women take the main part, though the bachelors of the village also join them. So far as the movements of the limbs in the execution of the dance are concerned it is not much different from the "Baran" dance (mainly performed in connection with the Durga Puja ceremony) in vogue in Bengal. The meaning of this dance is simply saluting the deity and while performing this the woman, besides waving her hands and bending her body to and fro, also bends her head every now and then in a posture of salute.

Dancing among the Kom people is now becoming more and more rare due to their contact with missionary civilisation, and it will be no wonder if these dances are totally forgotten by the people within a decade or half. Though apparently it will be no loss to the people who are thrusting their own civilisation upon them, it will be a great loss to the people concerned, for it shows their distinctive development in the field of art."



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